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A. Bertram Chandler

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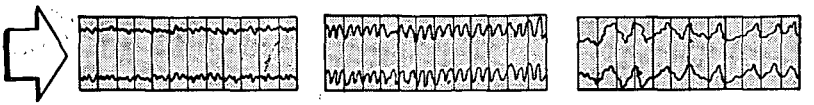

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The tractor was racing toward the ship as the dome melted down into a shapeless mass.

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SUNRISE ON MERCURY

by Calvin M. Knox

The question was: why was the sun rising a week ahead of schedule?

illustrated by EMSH

NINE MILLION miles to the sunward of Mercury, with the *Leverrier* swinging into the series of spirals that would bring it down on the Solar System's smallest world, Second Astrogator Lon Curtis decided to end his life.

Curtis had been lounging in a webfoam cradle waiting for the landing to be effected; his job in the operation was over, at least until the *Leverrier's* landing-jacks touched Mercury's blistered surface. The ship's efficient sodium-coolant system negated the efforts of the swollen sun visible through the rear screen. For Curtis and his seven shipmates, no problems presented themselves; they had only to wait while the autopilot brought the ship down for Man's second landing on Mercury.

Flight Commander Harry Ross was sitting near Curtis when he noticed the sudden momentary stiffening of the astrogator's jaws. Curtis abruptly reached for the control nozzle. From the spinnerets that had spun the webfoam, came a quick green burst of dissolving fluorochrene; the cradle vanished. Curtis stood up.

"Going somewhere?" Ross asked.

Curtis' voice was harsh.

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"Just — just taking a walk."

Ross returned his attention to his microbook for a moment as Curtis walked away. There was the ratchety sound of a bulkhead dog being manipulated, and Ross felt a momentary chill as the cooler air of the superrefrigerated reactor-compartment drifted in.

He punched a stud, turning the page. Then—

What the hell is he doing in the reactor compartment?

THE AUTOPILOT would be controlling the fuel flow, handling it down to the milligram, in a way no human system could. The reactor was primed for the landing, the fuel was stoked, the compartment was d o g g e d shut. No one—least of all a Second Astrogator—had any business going back there.

Ross had the foam cradle dissolved in an instant, and was on his feet in another. He dashed down the companionway and through the open bulkhead door into the coolness of the reactor compartment.

Curtis was standing by the converter door, toying with the release-tripper. As Ross approached, he saw the astrogator get the door open and put one foot to the chute that led downship to the nuclear pile.

"Curtis, you idiot! Get away from there! You'll kill us all!"

The a s t r o g a t o r turned, looked blankly at Ross for an instant, and drew up his other foot. Ross leaped.

He caught Curtis' booted foot in his hands and, despite a barrage of kicks from the astrogator's free boot, managed to drag Curtis off the chute. The astrogator tugged and pulled, attempting to break free. Ross saw the man's pale cheeks quivering; Curtis had cracked, but thoroughly.

Grunting, Ross yanked Curtis away from the yawning reactor chute and slammed the door shut. He dragged him out into the main section again, and slapped him, hard.

"Why'd you want to do that? Don't you know what your mass would do to the ship if it got into the converter? You know the fuel intake's been calibrated already; a hundred eighty extra pounds and we'd arc right into the sun. What's wrong with you, Curtis?"

The astrogator fixed unshaking, unexpressive eyes on Ross. "I want to die," he said simply. "Why couldn't you let me die?"

HE WANTED to die. Ross shrugged, feeling a cold tremor run down his back. There was no g u a r d i n g against this diesease.

Just as acqualungers beneath the sea's surface suffered from *l'ivresse des grandes profondeurs*—rapture of

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the deeps—and knew no cure for the strange, depth-induced drunkenness that induced them to remove their breathing-tubes fifty fathoms below, so did spacemen run the risk of this nameless malady, this inexplicable urge to self-destruction.

It struck anywhere. A repairman wielding a torch on a recalcitrant strut of an orbiting Wheel might abruptly rip open his facemask and drink Vacuum; a radioman rigging an antenna on the skin of his ship might suddenly cut his line, fire his directional-pistol, and send himself drifting away sunward. Or a Second Astrogator might decide to climb into the converter.

Psych Officer Spangler appeared, an expression of concern fixed on his smooth pink face. "Trouble?"

Ross nodded. "Curtis. Tried to jump into the fuelchute. He's got it, Doc."

SCOWLING, Spangler rubbed his cheek, then said: "They always pick the best times, dammit. It's swell having a psycho on a Mercury run."

"That's the way it is," Ross said wearily. "Better put him in statis till we get home. I'd hate to have him running loose looking for different ways of doing himself in.

"Why can't you let me die?" Curtis asked. His face was bleak. "Why'd you have to stop me?"

"Because, you lunatic, you'd have killed all the rest of us by your fool dive into the converter. Go walk out the airlock if you want to die—but don't take us with you."

Spangler glared warningly at him. "Harry—"

"Okay," Ross said. "Take him away."

The psychman led Curtis within. The astrogator would be given a tranquilizing injection, and locked in an insoluble webfoam jacket for the rest of the journey. There was a chance he could be restored to sanity, once they returned to Earth, but Ross knew that the astrogator would make a beeline for the nearest method of suicide the moment he was let loose in space.

BROODING, Ross turned away. A man spends his boyhood dreaming about space, he thought, spends four years at the Academy and two more making dummy runs. Then he finally gets up where it counts, and he cracks up. Curtis was an astrolgation machine, not a normal human being; and he had just disqualified himself permanently from the only job he knew how to do.

Ross shivered, feeling chill despite the bloated bulk of the sun filling the rear screen. It could happen to anyone... even him. He thought of Curtis, lying in a foam cradle

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somewhere in the back of the ship, blackly thinking over and over again *I want to die*, while Doc Spangler muttered soothing things at him. A human being was really a frail form of life, Ross reflected.

Death seemed to hang over the ship; the gloomy aura of Curtis' suicide-wish polluted the atmosphere.

Ross shook his head and punched down savagely on the signal to prepare for deceleration. The unspinning globe that was Mercury bobbed up ahead. He spotted it through the front screen.

THEY WERE approaching the tiny planet middle-on. He could see the neat division now: the brightness of Sunside, the unapproachable inferno where zinc ran in rivers, and the icy blackness of Darkside, dull with its unlit plains of frozen CO_2.

Down the heart of the planet ran the Twilight Belt, that narrow area of not-cold and not-heat where Sunside and Darkside met to provide a thin band of barely-tolerable territory, a ring nine thousand miles in circumference and ten or twenty miles wide.

The *Leverrier* plunged downward. "Downward" was actually a misnomer—space has no ups or downs—but it was the simplest way for Ross to visualize the approach. He allowed his jangled nerves to calm. The ship was in the hands of the autopilot; the orbit was precomputed and the analog banks in the drive were happily following the taped program, bringing the ship to rest smack in the middle of—

My God!

Ross went cold from head to toe. The precomputed tape had been fed to the analog banks—had been prepared by —had been the work of—

Curtis.

A suicidal madman had worked out the *Leverrier's* landing program.

ROSS' HANDS began to shake. How easy it would have been, he thought, for death-bent Curtis to work out an orbit that would plant the *Leverrier* in a smoking river of molten lead—or in the mortuary chill of Darkside.

His false security vanished. There was no trusting the automatic pilot; they'd have to risk a manual landing.

Ross jabbed down on the communicator button. "I want Brainerd," he said hoarsely.

The First Astrogator appeared a few seconds later, peering in curiously. "What goes, Captain?"

"We've just carted your assistant Curtis off to the pokey. He tried to jump into the converter."

"He—?"

Ross nodded. "Attempted suicide; I nabbed him in time. But in view of the circumstances, I think we'd better discard the tape you had him

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prepare and bring the ship down manually, yes?"

The First Astrogator moistened his lips. "Maybe that's a good idea," he said.

"Damn right it is," Ross said, glowering.

AS THE SHIP touched down, Ross thought, *Mercury is two hells in one.*

It was the cold, icebound kingdom of Dante's deepest pit—and it was also the brimstone empire of another conception. The two met, fire and frost, each hemisphere its own kind of hell.

He lifted his head and flicked a quick glance at the instrument panel above his deceleration cradle. The dials all checked: weight placement was proper, stability 100%, external temperature a manageable 108F., indicating they had made their landing a little to the sunward of the Twilight Belt's exact middle. It had been a sound landing.

He snapped on the communicator. "Brainerd?"

"All OK, Captain."

"How was the landing? You used manual, didn't you?"

"I had to," the astrogator said. "I ran a quick check on Curtis' tape and it was all cockeyed. We'd have grazed Mercury's orbit by a whisker and kept going— straight for the sun. Nice?"

"Sweet," Ross said. "But don't be too hard on the kid; it's not his fault he went psycho. Good landing, anyway. We seem to be pretty close to the center of the Twilight Belt, give or take a mile or two."

He broke the contact and unwebbed himself. "We're here," he announced over the shipwide circuit. "All hands to fore double pronto."

The men got there quickly enough—Brainerd first, then Doc Spangler, followed by Accumulator Tech Krinsky and the three crewmen. Ross waited until the entire group had assembled.

THEY WERE looking around curiously for Curtis, all but Brainerd and Spangler. Crisply, Ross said, "Astrogator Curtis won't be with us. He's aft in the psycho bin; luckily, we can shift without him on this tour."

He waited till the implications of that statement had sunk in. The men adjusted to it well, he thought, judging from the swiftness with which the horror faded from their faces.

"All right," he said. "Schedule calls for us to spend a maximum of thirty-two hours on Mercury before departure. Brainerd, how does that check with our location?"

The astrogator frowned and made some mental calculations. "Current position is a trifle to the sunward edge of the Twilight Belt; but as I figure it, the sun won't be high enough to put the Fahr-

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enheit much above 120 for at least a week. Our suits can handle that sort of temperature with ease."

"Good. Llewellyn, you and Falbridge break out the radar inflaters and get the tower set up as far to the east as you can go without roasting. Take the crawler, but be sure to keep an eye on the thermometer. We've only got one heatsuit, and that's for Krinsky."

Llewellyn, a thin, sunken-eyed spaceman, shifted uneasily. "How far to the east do you suggest, sir?"

"The Twilight Belt covers about a quarter of Mercury's surface," Ross said. "You've got a strip 47 degrees wide to move around in—but I don't suggest you go much more than twenty-five miles or so. It starts getting hot after that, and keeps going up."

"Yes, sir."

ROSS TURNED to Krinsky. The Accumulator Tech was the key man of the expedition; it was his job to check the readings on the pair of Solar Accumulators that had been left here by the first expedition. He was to measure the amount of stress created by solar energies here, so close to the source of radiation, study force-lines operating in the strange magnetic field of the little world, and re-prime the Accumulators for further testing at a later date.

Krinsky was a tall, powerfully-built man, the sort of man who could stand up to the crushing weight of a heat-suit almost cheerfully. The heat-suit was necessary for prolonged work in the Sunside zone, where the Accumulators were—and even a giant like Krinsky could stand the strain only for a few hours at a time.

"When Llewellyn and Falbridge have the radar tower set up, Krinsky, get into your heat-suit and be ready to move. As soon as we've got the Accumulator Station located, Dominic will drive you as far east as possible and drop you off. The rest is up to you. We'll be telemetering your readings, but we'd like to have you back alive."

"Yes, sir."

"That's about it," Ross said. "Let's get rolling."

ROSS' OWN job was purely administrative—and, as the men of his crew moved busily about their allotted tasks, he realized unhappily that he himself was condemned to temporary idleness. His function was that of overseer; like the conductor of a symphony orchestra, he played no instrument himself, and was on hand mostly to keep the group moving in harmony toward the finish.

Now, he had only to wait.

Llewellyn and Falbridge departed, riding the segmented,

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thermo-resistant crawler carried in the belly of the *Leverrier*. Their job was simple: they were to erect the inflatable plastic radar tower far to sunward. The tower that had been left by the first expedition had long since librated into a Sunside zone and been liquefied; the plastic base and parabola, covered with a light reflective surface of aluminum, could hardly withstand the searing heat of Sunside.

Out there, it got up to 700° when the sun was at its closest; the eccentricities of Mercury's orbit accounted for considerable Sunside temperature variations; but the thermometer never showed lower than 300° on Sunside, even during aphelion. On Darkside, there was little variation; temperature hung down near absolute zero, and frozen drifts of heavy gases covered the surface of the land.

From where he stood, Ross could see neither sunside nor Darkside. The Twilight Belt was nearly a thousand miles broad, and as the planet dipped in its orbit the sun would first slide above the horizon, then dip back. For a twenty-mile strip through the heart of the Belt, the heat of Sunside and the cold of Darkside cancelled out into a fairly stable temperate climate; for five hundred miles on either side, the Twilight Belt gradually tricked toward the areas of cold and raging heat.

IT WAS A strange and forbidding planet. Humans could endure it only for short times; the sort of life that *would* be able to exist permanently on Mercury was beyond his conception. Standing outside the *Leverrier* in his spacesuit, Ross nudged the chin control that lowered a pane of optical glass. He peered first toward Darkside, where he thought he saw a thin line of encroaching black—only illusion, he knew—and then toward Sunside.

In the distance, Lewellyn and Falbridge were erecting the spidery parabola that was the radar tower. He could see the clumsy shape outlined against the sky now—and behind it? A faint line of brightness rimming the bordering peaks? Illusion also, he knew. Brainerd had calculated that the sun's radiance would not be visible here for a week. And in a week's time they'd be back on Earth.

He turned to Krinsky. "The tower's nearly up. They'll be back with the crawler any minute. You'd better get ready to make your trip."

Krinsky nodded. "I'll suit up, sir."

As the technician swung up the handholds and into the ship, Ross' thoughts turned to Curtis. The young astrogator had prattled of seeing Mercury, all the way out—and now that they were actually here, Curtis lay in a web of foam deep within the

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ship, moodily demanding the right to die.

KRINSKY returned, now wearing the insulating bulk of the heat-suit over his standard rebreathing outfit. He looked like a small tank rather than a man. "Is the crawler approaching, sir?"

"I'll take a look."

Ross adjusted the lensplate in his mask and narrowed his eyes. It seemed to him that the temperature had risen somewhat. Another illusion, he thought, as he squinted into the distance.

His eyes picked out the radar tower far off toward Sunside. His mouth sagged open.

"Something the matter, sir?"

"I'll say!" Ross squeezed his eyes tight shut and looked again. And—yes—the newly-erected radar tower was drooping soggily, and beginning to melt. He saw two tiny figures racing madly over the flat, pumice-covered ground to the silvery oblong that was the crawler. And—impossibly—the first glow of an unmistakeable brightness was beginning to shimmer on the mountains behind the tower.

The sun was rising—a week ahead of schedule!

ROSS GASPED and ran back into the ship, followed by the lumbering Krinsky. In the airlock, mechanical hands descended to help him out of his spacesuit; he signalled to Krinsky to remain in the heat-suit, and dashed through into the main cabin.

"Brainerd! Brainerd! Where in hell are you?"

The senior astrogator appeared, looking puzzled. "Yes, Captain?"

"Look out the screen," Ross said in a strangled voice. "Look at the radar tower!"

"It's—*melting*," Brainerd said, astonished. "But that's—that's—"

"I know. It's impossible." Ross glanced at the instrument panel. External temperature had risen to 112—a jump of four degrees. And as he watched it clicked up to 114.

It would take a heat of at least 500° to melt the radar tower that way. Ross squinted at the screen, and saw the crawler come swinging dizzily toward them: Llewellyn and Falbridge were still alive, then—though they probably had had a good cooking out there. The temperature outside the ship was up to 116. It would probably be near 200 by the time the two men returned.

Angrily, Ross faced the astrogator. "I thought you were bringing us down in the safety strip," he snapped. "Check your figures again and find out where the hell we *really* are. Then work out a blasting orbit. That's the *sun* coming up over those hills."

"I know," Brainerd said.

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THE TEMPERATURE reached 120. The ship's cooling system would be able to keep things under control and comfortable until about 250; beyond that, there was danger of an overload. The crawler continued to draw near; it was probably hellish in the little landcar, he thought.

His mind weighed alternatives. If the external temperature went much over 250, he would run the risk of wrecking the ship's cooling system by waiting for the two in the crawler to arrive. He decided he'd give them until it hit 275 to get back and then clear out. It was foolish to try to save two lives at a cost of five. External temperature had hit 130. Its rate of increase was jumping rapidly.

The ship's crew knew what was going on now. Without direct orders from Ross, they were readying the *Leverrier* for an emergency blastoff.

The crawler inched forward. The two men weren't much more than ten miles away now; and at an average speed of forty miles an hour they'd be back within fifteen minutes. Outside it was 133. Long fingers of shimmering sunlight stretched toward them from the horizon.

Brainerd looked up from his calculations. "I can't work it. The damned fingers don't come out.'"

"Huh?"

"I'm computing our location—and I can't do the arithmetic. My head's all foggy."

What the hell, Ross thought. This was when a captain earned his pay. "Get out of the way," he snapped. "Let me do it."

HE SAT DOWN at the desk and started figuring. He saw Brainerd's hasty notations scratched out everywhere. It was as if the astrogator had totally forgotten how to do his job.

Let's see, now. If we're—

His pencil flew over the pad—but as he worked he saw that it was all wrong. His mind felt bleary, strange; he couldn't seem to handle the computations. Looking up, he said, "Tell Krinsky to get down there and be ready to help those men out of the crawler when it gets here. They're probably half-crooked."

Temperature 146. He looked back at the pad. Damn; it shouldn't be that hard to do simple trig, he thought.

Doc Spangler appeared. "I cut Curtis free," he announced. "He isn't safe during takeoff in that cradle."

From within came a steady mutter. "Just let me die... just let me die..."

"Tell him he's likely to have his wish," Ross murmured. "If I can't work out a blastoff orbit we'll all roast here."

"How come *you're* doing it? What's the matter with Brainerd?"

"Choked up. Couldn't do the figures. And come to

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think of it, I feel pretty funny myself."

Fingers of fog seemed to wrap around his mind. He glanced at the dial. Temperature 152 outside. That gave the boys in the crawler 123 degrees to get back here...or was it 321? He was confused, utterly bewildered.

Doc Spangler looked strange too. The psych officer was frowning curiously. "I feel very lethargic suddenly," Spangler declared. "I know I really should get back to Curtis, but—"

THE MADMAN was keeping up a steady babble inside. The part of Ross' mind that could still think clearly realized that if left unattended Curtis was capabe of almost anything.

Temperature 158. The crawler seemed nearer. On the horizon, the radar tower was becoming a crazy shambles.

There was a shriek. "It's Curtis!" Ross yelled, his mind returning to awareness hurriedly, and peeled out from behind the desk. He ran aft, followed by Spanger, but it was too late.

Curtis lay on the floor in a bloody puddle. He had found a pair of shears somewhere.

Spangler bent. "He's dead."

"Of course. He's dead." Ross echoed. His brain felt totally clear now; at the moment of Curtis' death, the fog had lifted. Leaving Spangler to attend to the body, he returned to the desk and glanced at the computations.

With icy clarity he determined their location. They had come down better than three hundred miles to sunward of where they thought they had been. The instruments hadn't lied—but someone's eyes had. The orbit Brainerd that had so solemnly assured him was a "safe" one was actually almost as deadly as the one Curtis had computed.

He looked outside. The crawler was almost there; temperature was 167. There was plenty of time. They would make it with a few minutes to spare, thanks to the warning they had received from the melting radar tower.

But why had it happened? There was no answer to that.

GIGANTIC in his heat-suit, Krinsky brought Llewellyn and Falbridge aboard. They peeled out of their spacesuits and wobbled unsteadily, then collapsed. They looked like a pair of just-boiled lobsters.

"Heat prostration," Ross said. "Krinsky, get them into takeoff cradles. Dominic, you in your suit yet?"

The spaceman appeared at the airlock entrance and nodded.

"Good. Get down there and drive the crawler into the hold. We can't afford to leave

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it here. D o u b l e-quick, and then we'll blast off. Brainerd, that new orbit ready?"

"Yes, sir."

The thermometer grazed 200. The cooling system was beginning to suffer—but its agonies were to be shortlived. Within minutes, the *Leverrier* had lifted from Mercury's surface—minutes ahead of the relentless advance of the sun—and swung into a temporary planet-circling orbit.

As they hung there, virtually catching their breaths, just one question rose in Ross' mind: *why?* Why did Brainerd's orbit bring them down in a danger zone instead of the safety strip? Why had both Brainerd and Ross been unable to compute a blasting-pattern, the simplest of elementary astrogation techniques? And why had Spangler's wits utterly failed him—just long enough to let the unhappy Curtis kill himself?

Ross could see the same question reflected on everyone's face: *why?*

He felt an itchy feeling at the base of his skull. And s u d d e n l y, an image forced its way across his mind in answer.

IT WAS A great pool of molten zinc, lying shimmering between two jagged crests somewhere on Sunside. It had been there thousands of years; it would be there thousands, perhaps millions of years from now.

Its surface quivered. The sun's brightness upon the pool was intolerable even to the mind's eye.

Radiation beat down on the zinc pool—the sun's radiation, hard and unending, and then a new radiation, an electromagnetic emanation with it a meaningful commutation:

I want to die.

The pool of zinc stirred fretfully with sudden impulses of helpfulness.

THE VISION passed as q u i c k l y as it came. Stunned, Ross looked up hesitantly. The expression on the six faces surrounding him told him what he wanted to know.

"You felt it too," he said.

Spangler n o d d e d, then Krinsky and the rest of them.

"Yes," Krinsky said. "What the devil was it?"

Brainerd turned to Spangler. "Are we all nuts, Doc?"

The psych o f f i c e r shrugged. "Mass hallucination...collective hypnosis...

"No, Doc." Ross leaned forward. "You know it as well as I do. That thing was real; it's down there, out on Sunside."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that wasn't any hallucination we had. That's *life*—or as close to it as Mercury can come." Ross' hands shook; he forced them to subside. "We've stumbled over

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something very big," he said.

Spangler stirred uneasily. "Harry—"

"No, I'm not out of my head! Don't you see—that thing down there, whatever it is, is sensitive to our thoughts! It picked up Curtis' godawful caterwauling the way a radar set grabs electromagnetic waves. His were the strongest thoughts coming through; so it acted on them and did its damndest to help Curtis' wish come true."

"You mean by fogging our minds, and deluding us into thinking we were in safe territory, when actually we were right near sunrise territory?"

"But why would it go to all that trouble?" Krinsky objected. "If it wanted to help poor Curtis kill himself, why didn't it just fix it so we came down right *in* Sunside? We'd cook a lot quicker that way."

ROSS SHOOK his head. "It knew that the rest of us *didn't* want to die. The thing down there must be a multivalued thinker. It took the conflicting emanations of Curtis and the rest of us, and fixed things so that he'd die, and we wouldn't." He shivered. "Once Curtis was out of the way, it acted to help the surviving crewmembers get off to safety. If you'll remember, we all thought and moved a lot quicker the instant Curtis was dead."

"Damned if that's not so," Spangler said. "But—"

"What I want to know is, do we go back down?" Krinsky asked. "If that thing is what you say it is, I'm not so sure I want to go within reach of it again. Who knows what it might make us do *this* time?"

"It wants to help us," Ross said stubbornly. "It's not hostile. You're not afraid, are you? I was counting on you to go out and scout for it in the heat-suit."

"Not me!" Krinsky said hastily.

Ross scowled. "But this is the first intelligent life-form we've hit in the Solar System yet. We can't simply run away and hide!" To Brainerd he said, "Set up an orbit that'll take us back down again—and this time put us down where we won't melt."

"I can't do it, sir," Brainerd said flatly. "I believe the safety of the crew will be best served by returning to Earth at once."

Facing the group of them, Ross glanced quickly from one to the next. There was fear evident on the faces of all of them. He knew what each of them was thinking: *I don't want to go back to Mercury.*

Six of them; one of him. And the helpful thing below.

THEY HAD outnumbered Curtis seven to one—but unmixed death-wish. Ross knew he could never generate

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enough strength of thought to counteract the fear-ridden thoughts of the other six.

This is mutiny, he thought, but somehow he did not care to speak the thought aloud. Here was a case where a superior officer might legitimately be removed from command for the common good, and he knew it.

The creature below was ready to offer its services. But, multi-valued as it might be, there was still only one spaceship, and one of the two parties—either he or the rest of them—would have to be denied its wishes.

Yet, he thought, the pool had contrived to satisfy both the man who wished to die and those who wished to stay alive. Now, six wanted to return—but could the voice of the seventh be ignored? *You're not being fair to me,* Ross thought, directing his angry outburst toward the planet below. *I want to see you. I want to study you. Don't let them drag me back to Earth.*

WHEN THE *Leverrier* returned to Earth, a week later, the six survivors of the Second Mercury Expedition could all describe in detail how a fierce death-wish had overtaken Second Astrogator Curtis and caused his suicide. But not one of them could recall what had happened to Flight Commander Ross, or why the heat-suit had been left behind on Mercury.

★

The Dreams department was supposed to give people the dreams of their choice, to put them into a world of their own. But something was wrong; Dreams clients were not getting what they paid for. And Norman Blaine had to find out the how and why of the mystery, before scandal broke!

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Memo from Associate Editor: *This story is downright reactionary!* Memo from Editor to Associate: *Yes, isn't it?*

The Demancipator

by G. C. Edmondson

THE LITTLE man smiled like a mail-order Mephistopheles and crossed his legs, giving careful attention to the creases. He tossed another pinch of chickenfeed to the pigeons before answering. "Hardly a year goes by that somebody doesn't dig it up and do a rehash. I'm used to it by now." He shrugged. "It's a living."

"A *living*!" the young man gushed. "A living, you call it! Sir, you are a living legend! Others have conquered empires; others have invented—but who among living men can say he has created an era?"

"I suppose I can," the other said. Again the smile flitted over his lined face like summer lightning. "I think it's time to puncture a few myths, though," he added, quietly.

"You mean there's an inside story?" The young man's nostrils began quivering.

The older man uncrossed his legs and tossed the rest of the grain to pigeons which fluttered at his feet. "Why not?"

FOR ONE not born in the first half of our century, a description of it is as meaningless as color to the congenitally blind. The rise of technology, the gradual disappearance of privacy the hot, cold, and lukewarm wars—all these contributed, but the hallmark of the age was a general tendency to

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The cornucopia of time saving devices was no longer greeted with delight . . .

Blow the whistle,
Ring the bell!
Run in circles.
Scream and yell.
Now, of course, the problem
has been solved. In those days

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we didn't even know what the problem was.

One of the unhappier men of that era was Carson Jones, last year's model of the young-man-to-be-watched. In the two years since he had joined the Klein-Schmidt agency, he had watched with a detached and sardonic amusement as one bad guess after another created lumber for the skids which Sid Vorshak was busily building under him.

"Morning, Jones," Vorshak said with an effusive bonhomie.

"Morning, Vorshak," Jones replied with even greater unctuousness. Vorshak's voice annoyed him. It was an ordinary enough midwestern voice, but somewhere along the line it had been channeled through Harvard and toward a spurious gentility. They sat facing each other across the mahogany table. Vorshak whipped a notebook from his pocket and began a furious scribbling as he hummed to himself.

CROMLEIGH came in. He reminded Jones of an old school-tie, knotted and pulled tight several times too many. They exchanged banalities while Vorshak hummed and scribbled. For the barest fraction of a second Jones glanced at the scribbler and back to Cromleigh. Cromleigh's face took the cast of one who has unwittingly swallowed emetic instead of orange juice, and for a moment communion flowed between them.

The Old Man entered. They rose and chorused, "Good Morning, Mr. Klein-Schmidt." The Old Man *harrumphed* and the conference got under way.

It was soon obvious that the session wasn't going to get very far away. The scribbler flipped pages and quoted statistics, but his Harvard slurred into South Chicagoese when he saw that the Old Man knew he didn't have a fresh idea this morning, either. A secretary entered and silently poured four cups of coffee.

The Old Man took a sip with a loud slurping noise. "What we need is something new," he said. He stood with one foot on his chair in what Jones secretly called Stance No. 3 and went into Speech No. 4 which began, *"When I started this business, thirty years ago, all I had was eighty dollars and an idea."*

The money had reproduced but the idea remained sterile. Jones daydreamed, nodding and yessing at automatic intervals. Cromleigh was also nodding. Vorshak gave periodic "yes, Chief" while he scribbled.

THE OLD MAN got to where he had made a fortune on the cake mix account, and Jones began losing touch. He wished he'd gotten a little more sleep last night. Five hours just wasn't enough. He

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came to with a start. The room was filled with silence; all eyes were on him.

"Five hours," Jones said automatically.

"Not feeling well?" Vorshak asked solicitously.

"Cake mix," Jones said, playing by ear and hoping frantically for a clue.

"Are you sleepy, Jones?" the Old Man asked.

"No, sir!" Jones said positively. "I was thinking." He looked at Cromleigh, but Cromleigh could only radiate sympathy; he'd been dozing, too. "Five hour cake mix," Jones said with a sureness he didn't feel.

"Drunk," Vorshak muttered.

"Like hell I am," Jones said angrily. He blustered a moment, trying to think something up. The Old Man glared, and Jones felt the skids slowly starting to move. Vorshak smiled maliciously, and prepared a parting shot. Jones glared back at him—then suddenly relaxed as Vorshak's face dissolved into a view of six months on Long Island, interrupted only by weekly visits to the unemployment office.

"I SAID FIVE hour cake mix," he repeated, with the airiness of one who no longer cares. "If you had a brain in your head, you'd see it's the biggest idea since the Schweppesman."

"Explain yourself," the Old Man said.

"It's simple. American women are surrounded by automatic machinery; they have nothing to do all day but push buttons and watch TV. When suppertime comes, it's minute this and instant that. In five minutes, supper's ready and then they settle down to an evening of boredom."

"So?" the Old Man said non-committally.

"So we change all that. We sell a packaged cake mix that takes five hours of hard work to prepare. Absolutely guaranteed to shoot the hell out of a dull afternoon."

"Not drunk—crazy," Vorshak muttered.

"Hmmmm," the Old Man hmmmmed.

Vorshak looked sideways at the Old Man and began hedging his bets. Jones waited for the Old Man to come to and shout, "You're fired!"

IN A MOMENT the Old Man hummmmed again and looked speculatively at Jones. "It's your baby," he said. "Let me see a rough layout tomorrow morning." He harrumphed and walked out of the room.

Vorshak rounded the table. "Congratulations, Jones," he said; "count on me for any help you need."

"You've helped enough already," Jones said. "Come on, Cromleigh, I'll buy you some lunch."

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Cromleigh looked nervously from one to the other, mumbled something about ulcers, and pointed apologetically to his carton of milk. Jones walked down the hall to his office. "Don't clear my things out just yet," he said.

"Why, Mr. Jones, were you thinking of leaving?" the girl asked.

"Silly girl don't you read the grapevine?"

He worked most of the night on the rough layout and the next day, to his infinite surprise, the Old Man liked it. He rushed the layout to the magazines, and spent the intervening time working up TV and radio coverage. Vorshak kept a distance nicely calculated to permit him to jump on or off the bandwagon as circumstances dictated. Meanwhile, the Old Man initialed roughs with a speed and lack of meddlesome suggestions which was positively amazing.

A MONTH passed. Hints dribbled out via radio and TV. After a month of hinting, which had the public (theoretically) frantic to be let in on the secret, came broader hints. Former Miss Americas predicted a new day in the kitchen. Three months from its conception, the outrage was perpetrated on an unsuspecting public.

The reaction was, as usual, shocked silence then uproarious laughter. They laughed at Columbus, and they laughed at Maidenform. But on Madison Avenue nobody was laughing at Jones—they were too busy imitating him. Two weeks after D-day, the Old Man was jubilant.

"Biggest thing since Davy Crockett," he announced gleefully.

"Yes, sir, Chief, we certainly put that one over", Vorhsak said; he had finally decided which way to jump.

"Oh, did you work on it too?" the Old Man asked.

"His greatest contribution was keeping out of my way," Jones put in.

Vorshak's mouth snapped shut, and he began scribbling in his notebook.

"I've been thinking of branching out a little," Jones continued.

"Fine! What did you have in mind?"

"I've been thinking. Couldn't we have somebody develop a recipe for an all day pudding? How about something that has to cook eight hours over a double boiler? Ought to be stirred constantly, too; have it lump if you leave it alone for a minute."

"By the way, Jones," the Old Man said, "I've been meaning to speak to you about a partnership."

"It it's all the same to you, Mr. Klein-Schmidt, I'll settle for a cash bonus."

THE KLEIN-SCHMIDT agency prospered for four

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"The oldtime fashions are coming back."

months; meanwhile, every other agency hastened to get into the act. The five hour cake mix was followed by three day fudge. Jones' all day pudding was a smashing success. Some unsung genius revived an angel food recipe, where the eggs had to be beaten by hand; and before people knew it things were out of control.

The Federated Women's Clubs of America slowly collapsed. A cadre of the Parent Teacher Association was preserved only by the persistence of a few fathers who continued attending meetings. Queen for a Day fizzled and was ultimately revived as King for a Day. The women were in the kitchen and too busy to be bothered.

NEAR THE end of the fourth month, the Old Man began to worry. At the morning conference he said, "Boys, we've milked the slow-down movement about to the end of its course. Now's the time to get on the ball with something new. Got to keep ahead of the competition, you know." He essayed a chuckle which didn't quite go over.

"Yes sir, Chief," Vorshak said eagerly.

Cromleigh hemmed a non-committal haw.

Carson Jones said nothing.

At that very moment, a bill was getting its first reading in the lower house. It was introduced very quietly, and not too many people were on hand to listen. At the second reading, a bored reporter heard it through and did a double take. He rushed to a phone with the scoop of the century, and was somewhat miffed when he finally found it on page 16B, between the sports page and the want ads in the evening edition. The morning edition didn't carry it at all.

That was how women were disenfranchised. When they heard about it the general reaction was, *so what?* They went back to kneading bread dough. Even the authors of the bill were amazed at the way women ignored the fact that they'd just lost the vote.

WHEN THE Old Man heard about it he didn't take it so quietly. "This'll ruin us," he said.

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"How so, Chief?" Vorshak asked.

Carson Jones stroked a newly-started mustache. "Can't you guess? What's the backbone of this business?"

"Sales, of course," Vorshak explained, as if to a child.

The Old Man shook his head sadly.

"And who controls the money?" Jones persisted. "Who squanders the family paycheck on the idiotic fripperies we dream up from week to week?"

Vorshak was beginning to get it.

"We put them back in the kitchen," Jones said. "And now they haven't time to read ads or watch TV."

"What can we do?" Vorshak asked.

"I don't know about you, but I've already done it."

"What?" the Old Man asked.

Jones pointed enigmatically at his mustache. "Have you noticed how many of these there are on the streets lately?"

"Of course!" the Old Man exclaimed. "It's obvious. Man blossoms out in whiskers whenever he gets the upper hand. Gad, what a name you could have made for yourself in this business!" he said regretfully.

"Still room for anybody who wants in," Jones said. "Cromleigh's with me."

"Thanks," the Old Man said. "I'm a little too old to change. Guess I'll pull out and go fishing. If I'm quick, I might even sell the business yet," he added with a smirk.

"I don't get it," Vorshak said.

"Cromleigh and I are in the comb and brush business; thinking of branching out in mustache cups soon."

THE GREYING little man stroked his beard and muckatooed at the pigeons. "And that's about all there is to it?" he said.

"One more thing," his companion asked, "What ever happened to Vorshak?"

"Ah, Vorshak," the old man said sadly. "Never did adjust; poor fellow was killed in a riot at a suffragette parade."

"Suffragette parade?"

"Oh we had a few in the first year or two. I understand that Vorshak was one of the leaders. The movement never gained much headway though. Most of the advertising men died of broken hearts when they called protest meetings, and no women showed up."

"Do you think women will ever vote again, sir?" the young man asked.

"Not a chance," Jones laughed. "We're back in the driver's seat. We won't make the same mistake twice."

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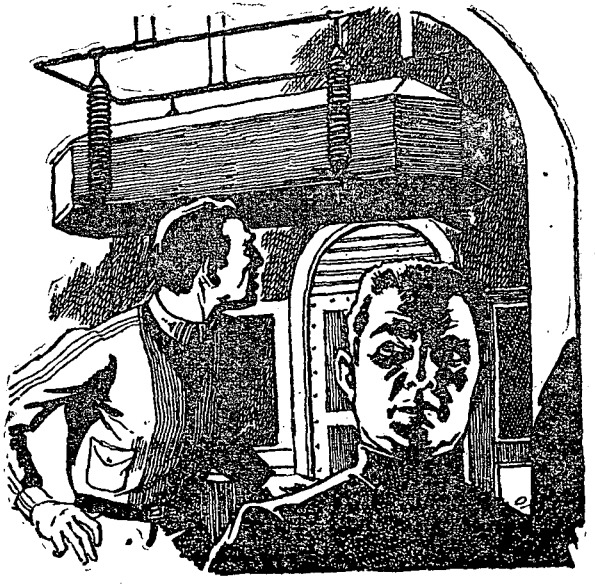
ZOOLOGICAL SPECIMEN

by A. Bertram Chandler



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ZOOLOGICAL SPECIMEN

Novelet by A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

The term was an euphemism, because spacemen and space passengers — like seamen in earlier days — were inclined to be superstitious. And people still didn't like the idea of sailing shipmates with a corpse. But this specimen was something more than a cadaver . . .

THE DRIVE had been cut, the ship had been put into her slow spin around her longitudinal axis, the passengers were settling down nicely, and everything in the garden, I thought, was lovely. Eight months of free fall lay ahead—eight months in which to square up the inevitable paper work (and this should take only a week at the outside), in which to keep the passengers happy with organised fun and games, in which to read all the various classics which, so far, I'd never gotten around to reading. (I still haven't.)

At 0800 hours Twayne, my Number Two, took over the watch. "Here you are," I told him. "Here we are. Deep Space conditions. Screens blank as a first trip cadet's mind—except for Mars, of course, but what's astern won't worry us. Nary a comet, nary a meteor. Spin set for half a G; if in doubt, call the Master. O.K.?"

"O.K.," he said.

I waited until he had strapped himself into the other chair, then knocked up the clips that held me into mine. I dropped through the well to officers' flat level, pulled myself into the radial alleyway leading to my room. Once inside I stripped off, went into the little shower cubicle. I enjoyed the shower. The water had a sting, a freshness, that's altogether lacking when you're a month out from port,

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when you're using water that's been used and re-used thousands of times before. Oh, I know that there's no difference in theory, I know that distilled water is much better for washing, anyhow, I know that any lack of freshness, or seeming lack of freshness, is psychological rather than physical, but...

ANYHOW, I enjoyed my shower, and I had my shave, and was just about to climb into a fresh uniform when Captain Gale came in. He had a sheaf of flimsy papers in his hand and a look of grave reproach on his normally good-humoured face. He sat down heavily in my chair, the springs creaking in protest. He said, in a bad tempered voice, "Mr. West, you should have told me."

"Told you *what*, sir?" I asked.

"This." He took one of the sheets—it was, I saw, part of the Manifest—threw it down on to my desk. Leaning forward in the chair he indicated one of the items with a stubby forefinger.

I looked over his shoulder.

One zoological specimen. I read. *Weight: 20 kilogrammes. Measurements: 2.5 x 1.25 x 1.25 metres.*

"Oh, yes," I said. "I had it stowed in Number 6 bin, and had the springs rigged. Judging by its size, it could be a sand hog. I don't know how it's been prepared— I'd say it's stuffed, it wasn't freezer cargo—but the bones are flimsy. I..."

"Sand hog!" said the Old Man. *"Sand hog!"*

"But the size..."

"Mr. West," he said, "if it were a sandhog, it would be declared as such on the Manifest. Don't those dimensions suggest anything else to you?"

"No. Unless... It could be a whole crate of sand worms."

"Sand worms!" he snarled.

I buttoned my shirt, climbed into my shorts.

"I don't see..."

"You wouldn't. Puppies flapping around Deep Space before they're weaned. Well, I suppose I have to tell you—and I warn you now that if you let out so much as a squeak of this to the other officers or the cadets—or the passengers—I, personally, will have you blown out through the drivers in small pieces.

"Mr. West—do you know what a euphemism is?"

"Yes. The use of a nice expression for one not so nice."

"GOOD 'Zoological Specimen' is a euphemism. It's been used aboard ships ever since Noah's Ark—although I don't suppose that Noah himself used it—his cargo was nothing else but Zoological Specimens. It's used because seamen, and space-

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men, and passengers, are apt to be superstitious. It's used because, for some absurd reason, people don't like sailing shipmates with a corpse; and a corpse is what we've got. You and I, West, are the only two who know about it; and we'll keep it that way."

"But the weight, sir..."

"They usually use lead coffins for these jobs," he said.

"But the freight..."

"Somebody," said the Old Man, "whose relations have more money than sense, died on Mars. Somebody has to be tucked away in the family vault, expense no object. Somebody has to wait until poor old Muggins Gale blows in with his decrepit old *Marsova* so that the disgusting cadaver can be wished on to him. Somebody has to wait until Muggins Gale goes away to the Green Mountains for a few days hard-earned leave, knowing full well that his dim-witted Mate will take every gramme of cargo, no matter how objectionable, that's wished on to him. Somebody..."

"The Agent should have told me, sir," I pointed out.

"He should have done. And next time in Braunport I'm having a very large piece of him. Well—you'll know in future."

"That sounded like the breakfast gong, sir."

"It was. Remember, West, not a word of this to anybody."

"Not a word, sir," I promised.

MY THREE passengers were at my table when I got aft to the saloon. Kennedy, the newsman, I had met before—in about every bar in Marsopolis. Trainer, a mining engineer, was a stranger to me, as was Lynn Davies. She looked like one of those long-legged blondes who, in scanty attire, hand top hats and magic wands and such to conjurors, the while distracting the attention of the customers from any sleight of hand. And that, I learned, was just what she was—she had been involved in some disagreement with the manager of the troupe of entertainers, with whom she was touring the Martian cities and settlements and, at his expense, was being shipped back to Earth.

"Hiya, West!" Kennedy greeted me. He introduced me to the others. "That was a nice, quiet getaway," he said. "You're to be congratulated; hardly felt a thing."

"*I* did," grumbled Trainer. His thin, lined face had a yellowish pallor. "And I really can't see why the air has to be so thick."

"Trainer's a local boy," said Kennedy; "a real Martian. Born and bred on the celestial dust bowl. What about you, Miss Davies?"

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"It didn't worry me," she said.

"FRANKLY," Kennedy went on, "I was surprised. We have a deadly combination here—Captain Gale and Chief Pilot West. Their blasting off technique has been described—and justly—as a westerly gale. Would it have been something in the cargo, West. Something—fragile? I was nosing round the ship, you know, while she was loading, and I saw your boys rigging the acceleration springs in one of the bins."

"Did you? Well, I'm peckish, folks. Shall we see what they have for us?"

We picked up our trays, walked to the long cafeteria bar, made our choices. "Make the most of the fresh food," I told the others. "We'll be getting vegetables and salads all through the trip—but in a week or so we shall be relying upon the processed yeasts and algae for protein."

"One would think that these ships could carry meat," said Kennedy. I didn't like the way that he accented the last word.

SPACESHIPS have often been likened to sailing ships—mainly, I think, because both made long voyages. But it is, in many ways, a false analogy. When the old windjammer pulled out on her long drag round the Horn, those on board knew that they had a sporting chance of making a quick passage—a combination of skillful Captain and sheer, blind luck could shorten the trip by weeks. Then, too, those on board—crew and passengers—had much more to break the monotony than has the interplanetary voyager. There was the occasional passing ship, now and again the sight of land, and always the changing sea and sky. The spacefarer is better housed, better fed and far more pampered than was ever the seafarer—but the oft-breathed air is stale, the too-often-used water is flat, and there is no other scenery than metal bulkheads, and ship fittings, and the emptiness outside at which it is not good to look. People, in the spaceship, bulk bigger than ever they did in any other form of transport. The ship, for most of her voyage, is no more than a huge projectile, dumbly obeying the laws of ballistics, over the movements of which the crew exercise a very limited degree of control.

Much of my time was taken up by organising, in conjunction with Helen Rand, our Chief Hostess, various sports and games to alleviate the boredom of both passengers and staff. There was a darts tournament, and a table tennis tournament, and all the usual card games. There was the inevitable moment—it comes on every voyage—when our Chef downed tools and said that

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he'd like to see some of the people who were so fond of criticising do any better with the limited range of materials to hand. There was the cooking competition, open to anybody, but for which there were surprisingly few entrants—cooking for a family is one thing, cooking for over sixty people is something else again. There were concerts. There were bull sessions at the bar. There was the formation and the breaking up of cliques. There was gossip, and there was scandal. And, unknowing—uncaring, the ship fell on and down to Earth's orbit.

FOR THE first few weeks Kennedy kept out of my hair. He had innumerable notes, made on his Martian tour, to lick into shape. Except for meals, he kept to his cabin, and the faint clicking of his lightweight portable typewriter could be heard at all hours of the arbitrary day and night. Trainer, the mining engineer at my table, was a very dull manger companion; his conversation consisted of little else but complaints. Lynn Davies was more interesting—her stories of show people were always entertaining. She threw a wicked dart and, with her as a partner, I got as far as the semi-finals in the table tennis tournament.

Then, one day before lunch, Kennedy walked into my room. Twayne was there, and Vera Kent—one of the Assistant Hostesses—and Lynn Davies. We were enjoying a quiet pink gin.

"Any for me?" asked Kennedy, helping himself to a glass and the gin bottle.

"We're rationed, you know," I told him.

"Have one with me at the bar before dinner," he said. "Here's to crime."

"Have there been any good ones lately?" I asked.

"Funny you should ask," he said. "As a matter of fact I've been sorting out my notes, as you know. This affair—the one that I'm telling you about—was rather outside my ambit, but I was knocking around a great deal with my Martian opposite numbers—do you know Graham of the *Press?* He's their crime reporter—and looked in on the whole business. It had all blown over by the time that you got in—but perhaps you remember the Latimer case, Miss Davies?"

"I do," she said.

"THIS LATIMER," Kennedy went on, "was an archaeologist."

"He wrote 'The Sleeping Cities', didn't he?" I asked.

"Yes. Queer book; disturbing, rather. I suggested to my big white chiefs that since I was coming all the way to Mars I might interview Latimer, and they told me that should they ever consider setting up a stall in the nut mar-

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ket they'd let me know, but until such time I came about, I should try not to confuse the news pages with the comic strips. Anyhow—this Latimer got himself knocked off—on the site of one of his digs. No injuries, either external or internal; no blunt instruments; nothing to suggest a dicky ticker; no expression of frozen horror on the face or in the staring eyes. Just—dead. Stopped. It hadn't been sudden. He'd had time to scrawl a few words in the sand with his gloved finger. He'd written, in clumsy block capitals, THEY ARE GO... And then somebody, or something, had brushed out the rest of it. His assistant says he saw, or thought he saw, a shadowy sort of creature scuttling away into the ruins."

"A sand hog?" suggested Twayne.

"No; not according to the account. It was too small, much too small. And it wasn't a sand worm, either; it had legs."

"Imagination," I said.

"Wasn't there something funny about the autopsy?" asked Lynn Davies.

"YEAH. WHAT was funny about it was that there wasn't one. Old Wallis, the Chief of Police, wanted Latimer taken apart to see what had made him stop ticking. But there was a frantic message from Earth, from the old boy's only surviving sister, making it plain that she wished to receive her dear brother's corpse intact so that he could be laid to rest in the family vault. There was some silly business about a mess up at the Resurrection if parts of him were on Mars and parts on Earth. And you know, as well as I do, how much power these minority religious groups have these days. So poor old Latimer was shoved into one of those fancy, hermetically sealed containers, just as he was, and there he'll stay in his nice, inert atmosphere of *morticon* gas until such time as he is delivered at his sister's front door and she opens the casket up to gaze for the last time on the features of her beloved brother."

"What was the sister's name?" I asked casually.

"Let me see, now. Hendrikson. Mrs. Phoebe Hendrikson."

"Would she be a zoologist?" burbled Twayne. "We've a specimen, special stowage, consigned to her."

I nudged him hard enough to spill his gin, but too late to stop him from spilling the beans.

"I don't see why you had to bother with those acceleration springs," said Kennedy. "I don't think that Latimer is going to feel any jolts."

SO THE CAT was partly out of the bag. Twayne and the Assistant Hostess could be told to keep quiet

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about it all, Kennedy and Lynn Davies could only be asked. And then I had to go and tell Captain Gale about it all. He took it rather better than I had anticipated, seemed pleased, rather than otherwise, to learn the identity of the corpse.

"You know, Mr. West," he said, "I should have counted it a very great honour to have carried Howard Latimer, were he still with us..."

"He is with us, sir; very much so."

"You know what I mean, West." He indicated a book on his desk. "Oddly enough I'm in the middle of reading his 'The Sleeping Cities'. He had something, you know; his interpretation of the hieroglyphs, fantastic though it may sound, seems to make better sense than the more orthodox ones. After all—we've found the ruins, and we've found the artifacts, but never a fossil, never a mummy, nothing at all to let us know what the old Martians were like. They're sleeping somewhere, Latimer said. They're sleeping, waiting until some unheard-of climatic cycle restores air and water to Mars..."

"Once the air and water have gone," I said, "they're *gone*."

"Well, then, waiting until some mugs of outsiders restore the air and water for them."

"If their science was as good as all that, sir, then surely they could have built themselves rockets and made the voyage to Earth or Venus."

"Perhaps their science ran on different lines to ours. Just for the sake of argument—suppose that they specialised, say, in biology and psychology. What use would that knowledge be in developing space flight?"

"We had to use plenty of each."

"M'm. Yes. Anyhow—impress upon Twayne and Miss Kent that they aren't to breathe a word of this Latimer business to anyone. I'll see Kennedy and Miss Davies myself."

I STILL DON'T know who was responsible for the leakage—but leakage there was. I don't think that it was Kennedy, I'm almost certain that it wasn't Twayne. It wasn't Lynn Davies. For my money it was Vera Kent. Whoever it was didn't really matter; it was the Chief Pilot—me—who was blamed.

At first, the Old Man didn't think that it was such a bad thing after all. It gave the passengers—and the staff—something to talk about, took their minds off the malicious gossip and scandal. And it provided material for at least three Brains Trust sessions on the old Martian civilisation, in the course of which some good sense and a deal of fan-

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tastic nonsense was talked.

So, for a while, for an arbitrary week or so, all went well. And then, subtly yet unmistakably, morale began to deteriorate. One cause of this was a silly woman among the passengers, a psychic, *she* said—a charlatan, I would say. Madame Kapitza she called herself (Lynn Davies, who knew people on the fringes of show business as well as the legitimates, said that her real name was Smith). Anyhow, this Madame Kapitza insisted on holding a seance. And with whom should she get in touch—after, of course, formal introductions by her Spirit Guide—but the ghost of Howard Latimer.

Yes, said Mr. Latimer, it was beautiful where he was, and he was very happy. Everybody—or every spirit—was very happy. But... He didn't like his sister, he was alleged to have said. He didn't like the family vault. He had been taken away from his life work, on Mars; he would suggest, respectfully, that Captain Gale t u r n the ship around, build up acceleration in the general direction of the Red Planet, then consign the coffin and its contents to the deeps of space. He, Latimer, would see to it that it made a landing on Mars, in the vicinity of one of the Sleeping Cities.

NONE OF the staff attended the absurd attempt at ghost raising— I got the whole silly story from Kennedy and Lynn Davies. "I could have done better myself," said Lynn. "I may be only a conjuror's assistant, but I've learned a few tricks. You should have seen it! That phoney ectoplasm! She'd never have gotten away with it on the stage!"

The Old Man wasn't at all pleased when I told him of what had been going on. He couldn't very well stop it—as I have said before, the laws protecting religious minorities are very stringent; Madame Kapitza had only to raise the cry of "Persecution!" to get us all into very serious trouble. All that he could do was to invite the big, fat "medium" up to his room for cocktails and try to persuade her that she must, somehow, have got the wires crossed and that it was Latimer's dearest wish to be buried on his home planet. The doubling of her personal liquor ration helped to persuade her that this was so. "Thank God," said Captain Gale to me afterwards, "that t h e r e ' r e more than one kind of spirit!"

THE NEXT piece of minor unpleasantry was the delegation of passengers, led by Trainer, who maintained that the body carried the germs of some hitherto unknown Martian plague, and that it should be incontinently dumped, in the interests of both the ship

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and of the human race in general. The answer to this demand was an uncompromising *No*—and there weren't any free drinks involved, either.

Then, as was reported by our Surgeon, there was an outbreak of unidentified and unidentifiable aches and pains, all of which must be, so said the sufferers, symptoms of the unknown plague.

Still—we coped; we had to. We crammed more organised fun and games into a day than the average passenger ship sees in a week. We posted a permanent watch of cadets on the door leading aft to the cargo space—this was after Trainer, accompanied by Kennedy and Madame Kapitza, had been caught trying to pick the lock with a piece of cunningly bent wire.

Kennedy was unrepentant.

"After all," he said, "this is news. Or it's the nearest we get to news in this tin coffin dangling in hard vacuum. I just wanted to see the old boy, slung there in his casket in his spider web of springs."

"You could have asked," I said.

"All right. I am asking."

"I'm having my weekly routine inspection of the cargo space tomorrow. Subject to the Master's approval, you can come with me. You won't see anything."

"I'll come, all the same."

"Subject to the Master's approval."

RATHER to my surprise, the Master did approve.

And so, at 1000 hours, carrying keys and torches, Kennedy and I pulled ourselves aft along the well to the big, circular door. The duty cadet helped us to open it, to hook it back.

There wasn't much to be seen. From the central shaft, the radial alleyways ran out to the skin of the ship; between the alleyways were the cargo bins. Kennedy showed interest in the shipment of whisky, the securely lashed and chocked casks whose contents, having made the round Earth-Mars voyage, would be sold at fantastic prices in the more ritzy bars of Earth.

"I never could tell the difference," he said; "but it's a good racket."

"So are these dried sand worms," I told him. "They're worth their weight in platinum in Shanghai. Pickled ones in this bin—it's claimed that acceleration, deceleration, radiation and all the rest of it complete the maturing process."

"To hell with pickled sand worms. I want to see a pickled archaeologist."

"All right. Number 6 Bin—where are the keys? Ah, here we are."

I unlocked and opened the door, switched on the lights. There wasn't much to see; there was just a wooden case, with stencilled marks and numbers, suspended in the

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cunningly devised network of fine, steel springs.

"I DON'T like the way it's quivering," said the newsman.

"It's bound to quiver. There's always vibration in a ship—generators and other auxiliary machinery, even people walking around. Look!" I stamped hard on the web frame on which we were standing; the big case shook in its web like an infuriated spider.

"What was that noise?"

"Come off it, Kennedy; you're as bad as that old witch Kapitza. Haven't you ever heard springs creaking before?"

"M'm. Yes. But..."

"Whoever oiled the springs last didn't make a very good job of it," I said. "Well, that's all."

"O.K.," said Kennedy. "Thanks."

We locked the door—and I don't mind admitting that I wasn't sorry to hear the clicking of the wards. I'd rationalised the quivering mentioned by Kennedy—but I'd failed to convince myself that it was due to ship vibration. I'd carried cargo in special stowage before—but never before had I noticed that much motion in the spring webbing. That must have been, I told myself, because I'd never been looking for it.

As we pulled ourselves back forward along the central wall I had to fight hard to prevent myself from looking behind. My feeling of unease lasted until I was invited to stop at the bar by Kennedy. A second stiff whisky chased the formless fears out of my mind—for the time being.

THEN THERE was the business of Minnie. She was the ship's cat and was, I think, senior to any of the human staff in years of service in the one vessel. In spite of her habit of having her kittens in both unsuitable and highly improbable places, she was regarded with both toleration and affection. She was—as cats can be—a person.

It was at 0430 hours, Greenwich and Ship's Time. I'd taken over the watch from young Welby, the Third Pilot, and was relaxed in the pilot's chair, sipping a bulb of hot, sweet tea. There was nothing on the screens—nothing of immediate interest, that is—and all the meters were showing just what they should show. Rawson, Senior Cadet and my junior watchkeeper, was making his rounds and would shortly be along to report all well.

He was along shortly, but not to report all well. He looked upset about something.

"Well?" I asked.

"It's Minnie, sir."

"What about her? She can't be having any more kittens; not yet. The current issue's only just got its eyes open."

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"She's...dead."

"What? Dead? Minnie dead?"

"Yes, sir. You know that little alleyway by the linen locker, where Minnie has the box with the kittens in it. I looked in there, just to speak to her, and I found her dead."

"Who did it? If I find out..."

"I don't think it was anybody, sir; there weren't any marks. But it looked as though she'd been fighting something, trying to keep it away from the kittens."

"Were they all right?"

"Yes."

I finished my tea, filled and lit my pipe. I remembered, suddenly, Trainer and his absurd story about unknown Martian plagues. It scared me.

"Rawson," I said, "go to your room, and scrub your hands— I suppose that you touched the poor brute. Scrub your hands thoroughly; then go and give the Surgeon my compliments, ask him to examine the body. I'll call the Old Man."

CAPTAIN GALE awoke almost as soon as I buzzed him. "Yes?" came his irritable bark through the telephone. "Yes? What is it, West?"

I told him.

He didn't waste any time by wanting to know what the hell I meant by calling him out at this hour of the morning over a dead cat. He just said that he'd be on the bridge at once.

Clad in his dressing gown, he was with me in a matter of seconds. He took the other chair. He told me to carry on smoking, poked tobacco into the bowl of his own pipe with a stubby forefinger and lit up. I told him what had happened, what I had done.

"You were right," he said. "No matter what the cause of death, we can't afford to take any risks. This much we know —Latimer died the same way. Unluckily, there was no suspicion of foul play and, therefore, no autopsy. Even so, I think that the Police fell down very badly in not having a proper examination. Latimer died and now Minnie's dead..."

The buzzer sounded, and the Old Man picked up the handset. "Yes, Surgeon? Not a mark, you say? Well, take her apart, man; find out what it was, if you can." He replaced the instrument. He asked half-seriously, "Have we any Egyptians among the staff or passengers? We don't want any religious minorities to interfere with *this* dissection."

IT WAS A little after 0630 hours when the Surgeon reported to the bridge in person.

"I'm not a vet.," he said, "but I think I should be able to find out how, or why, any animal died. Regarding Minnie—I can't. She just—stopped. I even shaved her.

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There's a tiny puncture at the base of the right ear, but no swelling or discolouration."

"Poison?" asked the Old Man.

"It could be; it just could be. But there's the lack of symptoms. And, unluckily, I haven't a fully-equipped laboratory..."

"Come to that," I said, "she could have made this puncture herself. Scratching."

"Come that that," agreed the Surgeon, "she could."

"Have her passed out through the garbage shute," said the Old Man.

"It'd be better," said the Surgeon, "if we found room for her in the domestic freezer."

"It would not," said Captain Gale. "If it is some sort of fancy plague, her body'll carry the germs of it..."

The Surgeon paled. "I dissected her," he said.

I LOOKED at the Old Man and he looked at me. The Old Man drew deeply on his pipe, then took it out of his mouth. He said—"My apologies, Surgeon; I should have thought of that. But we don't know that it is plague. And surely, in all the years that we've been on Mars, any local disease would have struck long before now. And it'd take a tough germ to break out of Latimer's hermetically sealed casket. Nobody's who's touched or handled the case has been ill."

"No," I said.

"Even so," said Captain Gale, "we'll consign the body to Space. I may be oldfashioned—but I just don't fancy the idea of having skinned, eviscerated cat, even Minnie, stowed among such frozen meats as we have carefully conserved for the Farewell Dinner. It'd put me off my turkey. Furthermore—we have the kittens. If mother had some rare disease, the odds are that they will have caught it, too, that they will succumb long before any of the human beings. So, Surgeon, as and from now, you are O.C. cats. Treat Minnie's children as you would your own. And if any of 'em kick the bucket, let me know at once."

"Don't you think, sir," I suggested, "that we should pass Latimer's body overside?"

"No. Please bear in mind, Mr. West, that the Line is being paid a considerable sum in freight for the transportation of Latimer's corpse. We—or you—accepted liability for it, and we're liable. If we jettison, and if they ask us why, we'll say, 'Oh the cat died'. Well?"

"General Average?" I muttered.

"I can just see Lloyd's paying out their share, let alone anybody else. No, Mr. West, just dismiss any wild thoughts you might have of jettison."

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"I think you're right there," said the Surgeon. "After all—*morticon* gas has been proved lethal to every known type of microorganism."

He looked a lot happier, until I muttered, "Every *known* type..."

"Come and see me after breakfast," said the Old Man to the mdical officer. "And bring your Surgeon's Log with you."

KENNEDY came up for a drink before lunch that day.

"You know," he said, "we of the Press develop our own special variety of E.S.P. There's some kind of a flap in progress—I can feel it in my water. Where's that charming cat, by the way, and her charming kittens?"

"She was sleeping in one of the cross alleyways," I lied. "Young Rawson was making his rounds this morning; he trod on her."

"That's not lethal, surely?"

"In this case it was."

"And the kittens?"

"The Surgeon's looking after them."

"Lots of people," I said, "don't like cats, but like kittens."

"I've got a hunch," said Kennedy. "Shall you and I take a stroll down to the cargo space?"

"IT'S NEITHER the time nor the day for inspection." Then I realised that Kennedy was deadly serious, was badly scared about something. His hand, as put the glass down, was quivering perceptibly, and I remembered that quivering case in its network of steel springs.

"The Time Capsules," said Kennedy suddenly. "You've heard of them? They've found 'em in all the ruined cities, assumed that they were on the same lines as the ones *we* leave loafing around—rolls of microfilm, specimen newspapers and all the rest of it. All the ones they've managed to open so far have had nothing but dust inside—Latimer reckoned that this was because of faulty workmanship on the part of the manufacturers. There were the two halves of one of the capsules where Latimer's body was found—and I've heard that there wasn't any dust inside..."

"The wind blew it out," I said.

"Maybe. But I shouldn't mind betting, West, that if we go aft now, and break open the case, open the casket, we shan't find much left of Latimer."

"Rubbish."

"It's not rubbish. You've read 'The Sleeping Cities.' You know what Latimer reckoned the old Martians were like—something on the lines of arthropods rather than mammals something living in a sort of symbiosis with the sand hogs..."

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"All theories," I said. "All theories. Not an atom of proof."

"I lied to you," said Kennedy slowly, "when I said that I had a hunch. I've more than a hunch." With his left hand he tapped the little press camera that he wore always on his right wrist. "I always keep Betsy loaded and ready. You never know, do you? And last night I thought I saw... something, flickering along the alleyway outside my room. I shot from the cuff." He pulled his notecase from his pocket, took from it a single, tiny print. From another pocket he pulled a magnifier. "No facilities on board for enlarging," he said. "But, look."

I looked.

THERE WAS *something* in the alleyway. It was blurred, and it seemed to be at least semi-transparent. Perhaps it was the semitransparency that made it look, to my eyes, like something that should have been drifting around in the clear water of a rock pool rather than along an alleyway of an interplanetary ship. The body was indistinct, but seemed to be covered with chitinous armour. There was a bundle of feathery appendages that could have been legs, tentacles, antennae—or all three. There was a pair of stalked eyes.

"Kennedy, You swear that this isn't a trick photograph?"

"I swear it," he said grimly.

I believed him, and said so.

"Then what are we waiting for?" he asked.

"We must see the Old Man, now."

"It's wasting time."

"Don't be absurd. You were long enough coming to see me after you got the photograph developed, and you were long enough coming to the point after you did see me."

"I suppose I was. I've been trying to convince myself that the camera wasn't lying. I've been trying to find other evidence—but I haven't done so yet. The only way to find out for sure is to open up that casket."

"You mean," I said bitterly, "that Jake Kennedy, our star reporter has been trying to solve the case singlehanded while the poor, ignorant spacemen bumble around all unknowing of the dreadful fate from which the pride of the press is trying to save them."

He had the grace to blush.

"All right. Bring your photograph, and we'll go and see the Captain."

I WAS SURPRISED by the Old Man's reception of Kennedy's story. But then, he was an admirer of Latimer's, must have at least half believed the man's theories. He went to his safe, took out three five millimetre automatics, each with a full clip of forty rounds. He said, briefly,

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"Mr. West—how often is the door to the cargo space opened?"

"Once daily, sir, when Rawson checks the temperatures."

"And it's hooked back, of course, when he's inside... And Number Six bin—is there any way in or out when the door is locked?"

"Yes, sir. A cranked ventilating shaft."

"H'm. Get your keys, and three torches. You and Kennedy had better take a pistol each—here. Oh—get two of your cadets along with the tools for opening a case."

I WENT, THEN, to get the keys and to organise the cadets for the working party. The Old Man and Kennedy were waiting for us, in the central well, when we got aft. We opened the door, dropped aft to the correct radial alleyway, clambered down the ladder to the most convenient web frame. I unlocked the door of Number Six bin, swung it open and hooked it back. The case was still there, hanging quietly in the acceleration springs.

"It's not quivering now," whispered Kennedy. "It's not quivering..."

"Unhook it," ordered Captain Gale. "Unhook it. Lift it down and out."

We unhooked it, carefully lifted it out into the narrow alleyway. It was then that we saw that the back of it, the side of it that had been hidden from view, was riddled with holes, large, ragged holes, each about two inches in diameter. The three of us stood with pistols ready while the two cadets stripped the weakened woodwork from the casket. The casket was still there—but it, too, had been damaged in the same way as had been its wooden casing. I switched on my torch, shone the beam in through the holes. So far as I could see, the casket was empty.

The Old Man laughed—a bitter, humourless sound. "You've proved your theories, Latimer," he said. "Pity that you had to do it in my ship. Mr. West!"

"Sir?"

"We'll hold an officers' conference, at once, on the bridge. On your way forward get hold of the Senior Hostess, tell her to have all the passengers, and all the staff who aren't at the conference, gathered in the saloon—and to keep the doors shut. And you, as soon as you get up to the bridge, shut all the air-tight doors."

IT WAS WHILE we were discussing ways and means on the bridge that the real trouble started. By closing the airtight doors, we had merely succeeded in shutting up the Martians in the same section of the ship as our own people. They must have been hiding in the ventilating shafts—in any case, it was

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from the trunking that they dropped down into the crowded saloon. There was panic with that first attack, blind fear as the flimsy monstrosities drifted through the crowded compartment, lashing right and left with their hair thin cilia.

There was the crackling of electrical discharge, the acrid odour of ozone. There was the Chef running berserk with his carving knife, avoiding electrocution by a miracle, and the retreat of the invaders to the trunkways. All this we missed, hearing the shouting and the screaming but arriving on the scene too late to play any part in the initial skirmish. When we dropped into the saloon from the central well we found seven human dead stretched out on the deck and, a little way from them, two slashed and tattered things with crumpled, transparent armour, flimsy, broken legs and antennae sprawled in a pool of sour smelling body fluids.

"I got them," shouted the Chef wildly, waving his long knife. "I got them; they were trying to drag her away with them." He pointed to one of the bodies. It was that of Madame Kapitza.

Suddenly the Old Man was an old man. He called the Chief Hostess from the huddled crowd, said, "Tell us what happened."

SHE WAS badly shaken, but she told us, wasting no words, omitting nothing. She stressed the seemingly electrical nature of the Martians' natural weapons, supported the Chef in his assertion that there had been an attempt to capture at least one of the victims.

"See if artificial respiration is any good," said the Captain to the Surgeon. "You, West, and you, Kennedy keep your pistols handy watch the ventilators." He walked to the two Martian bodies and stirred one with the toe of his shoe. "They're flimsy brutes. Mr. Twayne, come with me back to the bridge. Mr. West—you're in charge here in my absence. I'm going to cut the spin, then I'm going to slam on five gravities acceleration—so make sure that everybody's prone when I do so."

I started to consider what orders I should have to give. First, with the spin cut, there would be weightlessness to contend with. Then, when the drive started, what had been the after bulkhead would become the deck. I should be lucky if we completed the manouevre without any broken bones. But to send passengers and personnel to their cabins, to their acceleration couches, would be out of the question.

Meanwhile—what freedom of movement had the Martians got? In our hasty scramble

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from the bridge to the saloon we had opened the airtight doors again. Until they were shut once more, all the ventilation system was a highway to the invaders—a highway that they would not be able to use when crushed by acceleration.

I WATCHED the Captain, followed by Twayne, mount the flimsy folding staircase that led "up" to the central well. I saw him pause at the head of it as he opened the door. I saw the shadowy form in the near darkness, and the lashing cilia, and I fired—but I was too late. For a long moment Twayne clung desperately to the handrails, but the Captain's weight had caught him off balance and, together, they fell. Twayne got to his feet uninjured. The Old Man didn't move.

"Mr. Twayne," I said, "get on the blower to the bridge. See if Welby's all right."

Twayne walked slowly to the intercom telephone, dialled, held the hand set to his ear. "There's no reply," he said.

"Do something!" screamed a woman. "You're in charge. *Do* something!"

"Has anybody got any suggestions?" I asked.

Lynn Davies came to my side. She must have come straight from the sports room when the initial alarm was given—her costume, what there was of it, left very little to the imagination. She grinned and said, "I could hand you a top hat, and you could pull a white rabbit from it."

"Thanks, Lynn," I said; "but I'm afraid that white rabbits wouldn't be much good right now."

But I was glad to have her with me, glad to find that one, at least, of the passengers was cool enough to joke about what was a very nasty predicament.

"We could parley," said Trainer.

"Parley? How?"

"They must have a language."

"And they know it," I said, "and we don't."

"Yes. You could parley," said a new voice.

ALL OF US turned to stare in amazement at the after ventilating shaft. It was dark inside, and we could see little but vague movement, a stirring of shadows. *"You could parley,"* said the voice again. The voice? It was more like the sound of the wind in trees, somehow shaping itself into syllables and words rustling, expressionless.

"Who are you?" I asked. "What are you?"

"I am the...mother. The queen. As a larva I fed on the cells of the being you call Latimer. I fed on the cells of his brain—and ate his knowledge and his memories..."

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"Impossible!" barked the Surgeon.

"I am the queen, and the others are my...slaves. I carry in me the seed of the race, and the memories and the knowledge of all our hosts from the beginning. The wise ones said that we were to sleep, and that some day new, young beings would drop down from the stars and that we would start anew. We are starting anew."

"You're not," I said.

"But we are. We hold this little flying world you call a ship. You cannot move from this cell in which we hold you captive."

"All right. What do you want?"

"We want one of the tiny ships, the lifeboats, you call them. We know that your race holds our world and is too strong to be evicted. We know that we could never conquer your world. But there are other worlds among the stars and we shall find one."

I FELT A stab of sympathy for the strange being, for its pitiful naivity, for its foolish dream of making an interstellar voyage in a lifeboat. It was plain to see that Latimer had known little of astronautics.

"How will you navigate?" asked Twayne.

"Navigate? Oh yes. The young being who was at the controls of this ship has been...stopped, and now carries our seed. The mother, when she is mature will hold all his memories and knowledge. But we must have more hosts. The ones we...killed in the fight are no longer fresh enough."

"How many?" I asked, hoping that by prolonging this crazy, nightmarish conversation I should learn something which would aid us in our fight against the Martians.

"Six. They must be young, and half of either sex."

"Agreed!" shouted somebody. "Take the six hosts, and go!"

I turned to see who it was that had spoken. It was an old man, someone who knew that he would not be required. I said coldly, "I'm in charge here. I haven't capitulated; I'm trying to find out what we're up against."

"You make treaties," said the voice. *"You make treaties, and you honour them. Surely what I ask is not much."*

"All right," I said; "we make treaties. But I'd like to see what I'm making a treaty with."

"You shall. But you are armed. Have I your word that you will not use your weapons?"

"You have," I said, after a long hesitation. "Have I yours?"

"Don't be a fool, West," cried Twayne.

"Let him play it his own

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way," whispered Kennedy.

"You have our word," said the voice.

SLOWLY, slowly the thing lowered itself from the ventilator. It was like the beings that had already been killed, but far larger. I stared, fascinated, at the internal organs which, clearly visible through the transparent armour swelled and pulsed. *That must be the heart,* I decided, *and* that *the brain...* Somebody **s c r e a m e d**, and Lynn Davies' fingers dug painfully into my arm. The worst part of all was the exposed vocal chords of the brute, and the way in which they quivered when it spoke.

"I find you repulsive, too," it said.

"Drop that!" I heard Kennedy say.

I turned to see that Kennedy had caught Twayne's arm before he could bring his pistol to bear.

"You are not to be trusted," said the Martian. Swiftly it pulled itself back inside the ventilator.

"I gave my word," I said to Twayne. "I'm in the habit of keeping it."

"You gave your word to a...a prawn!" spluttered the Second Pilot.

"Stalemate," said the Surgeon.

"IT WILL be a long time before they have their navigator, anyhow," I remarked.

..*"Not long,"* said the Martian. *"Our seed grows fast. Already my mind talks to the mind of my daughter queen. Already I am learning, from her, more and more about this flying world of yours."*

"Bluff," I said—then remembered how Latimer's body had been preserved. It may well have been that the *morticon* gas had slowed down the growth of the seed. Anyhow, there was one comforting thought. The **M a r t i a n s** seemed to have telepathy—but only among themselves.

"I grow impatient," said the Martian. *"I shall be in the adjoining cell. Send in your six hosts one by one, that I may plant the seed in their bodies."*

"And if we refuse?"

"I told you, I talk with my daughter queen. I learn how the flying world is built. I know that I can shut all doors to your cell, and let the air blow out into the emptiness outside. One by one, I say, to the number of six, three male and three female, and with no weapons. Should any try to attack me—then the order goes to my slaves to open the...valves. And I do not wish to be kept waiting."

Abruptly, a clanging sound came from the orifice of the ventilator. I saw that the air tight seal had slid into place It was obvious that the Martian had not been bluffing.

"Are you calling for volun-

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teers?" asked Twayne. "Or casting lots?"

THERE WAS a painful singing in my ears. I swallowed, and it ceased. "A reminder," I said—and even to myself my voice sounded thin and faint. When the airtight door into the Sports Room slid open the sudden restoration of normal pressure made me giddy.

"Someone has to be first," said Lynn Davies. She looked down at herself with a rueful smile. "At least, they'll never think that I'm armed. I couldn't hide a penknife in this rig!"

Her face pale, but with head held high, she walked to the partly open door. "Lynn!" I cried, putting out a futile hand to stop her.

"Let her go," snarled Twayne.

I shook him off, started after the girl. I felt in the waistband of my shorts for the pistol, but it was gone. It didn't matter; fists and feet would be more satisfying.

In the doorway stood two of the smaller Martians, cilia waving. I'd have blundered in to them, been electrocuted, if Kennedy hadn't caught me. "You can't do anything!" he shouted. "*You* can't do anything!"

Something in the tone of his voice calmed me down. He knew something, I could tell. But what?

Together we watched the girl walk slowly to the monstrosity that squatted—and the incongruiy almost sent me ino a fit of hysterical laughter—on the tennis table. We watched the waving antennae, the slow unsheathing of what must be the oviposter. Kennedy's gun was out and ready—and then the door shut.

"She'll make out," said Kennedy.

"What do you mean?"

In answer, muffled by the metal of the door, there came the sound of five rounds rapid fire. Then, after a pause, three single shots. Then silence.

When the telephone buzzed I ran to it, snatched the instrument out of its rest. "Lynn here," said the voice. "All the doors are shut. How do I get out of here?"

WE GOT HER out, eventually, and got ourselves out of the saloon. We had to force our way into the ventilating system—doing irreparable damage to the sealing plates, and work our way to the bridge. We found several of the smaller Martians, but they were all dead. We found, too, Welby's body—and it was not a pleasant sight stirring and . . . rippling as it was with alien life. I had it carried at once to the nearest airlock and jettisoned without ceremony.

When it was all over, when the ship had settled down once more to an approximation of normal routine, I sat

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with Lynn and Kennedy, trying to piece together an account of what had happened for the Official Log.

"And now, Lynn," I said, "let's have your side of it."

"Well," she said "it seemed to me to be fairly obvious that the queen was running the whole show by telepathic control. I thought that once she was dead the workers—or the slaves, as she called them—would be pretty helpless. It so happens that they were even more helpless than I thought—too helpless to go on living. Anyhow, I had to kill the queen."

"But *how*?"

"With your automatic, of course."

"But you were unarmed; I'd swear to that."

"I told you once," she said, "that I was hoping to start my own magic show. How could I hope to pull the wool over the eyes of an intelligent, human audience if I couldn't fool just one, stupid cross between a prawn and a queen bee?"

★

Next Time Around

When I typed the copy for this department last time, I was in a state of most unblissful ignorance. I had no idea what a job it would be to get Science Fiction Stories on to a monthly schedule. It's going to take a little longer than I thought — but barring utter disaster, you'll see the change in 1957.

Meanwhile, Frank Kelly Freas has painted a delightful cover for our next issue from an as-yet untitled story by Robert Silverberg.

The July issue will mark the return to our pages of a gentleman who's made quite a mark in science fiction, but who hasn't been seen very frequently of late. I refer to Fritz Leiber, who offers us another one of those short stories with a punch. The title is "Femmequin 973".

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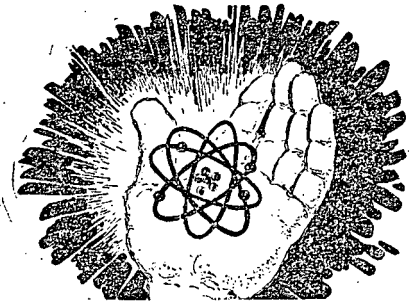
Editorial



PROPHECY

THE WORD "prophecy" makes you think of bearded patriarchs, lean, ascetic men crying in the wilderness, a turbaned figure peering into a crystal globe, a young woman in a trance, an old woman with a deck of cards or a dish of tea leaves, a sharp-featured figure atop a soap box. Prophets, seers, fortune-tellers, visionaries... some assuring that all is well—there will be good luck, love, happiness...some crying havoc...

Then perhaps you think of the "inside" man who makes informed predictions...a news commentator, a statistician outlining trends, predictions of the way an election will go, choices for the finishing lineup of the major league baseball teams, the daily weather forecasts...

And someone will say, now and then, that science fiction is —or ought to be—prophecy. An oldtime fan with a good, though highly selective, memory may start reeling off the various wonders that science fiction predicted: ocean-crossing dirigibles; air conditioning; the superiority of heavier-than-air over lighter-than-air flying machines; television; transatlantic telephones; the tank; pneumatic tubes; magnetic lights; Musak; aircraft-as-a-devastation weapon; limitations of aircraft as a conquering weapon; labor unions as big business; socialist imperialism; control of pupulations by propaganda machines; radar; teaching one in one's sleep—all these, and many others before the first issue of *Amazing Stories* appeared on the newsstands. Most of the stories, of course, merely described what the devices did—they didn't go

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into the theoretical principles. Hugo Gernsback was a notable exception.

Then, after we get into the magazine era, our selective-memoried fan will go on into atomic power, rocketry, and so on.

I EMPHASIZE the selective aspect of memory in this connection, because most fans forget, when they're off on such a track, that no science fiction author (by adoption, since the term didn't exist before 1929) described the automobile, the motion picture, or radio before the fact—three of the most fundamental industries and social forces in our century.

L. Sprague de Camp pointed out, some five years ago, that if you ratio the realized predictions to the wrong guesses, as well as consider important developments that were not foreseen at all, then the record of science fiction as prophecy is no better than any other means of visioning things to come. I think Sprague was being extremely charitable; considering the fact that science fiction authors (supposedly) have been speculating on the basis of extrapolation from the "known" at the moment, my impression is that science fiction writers, as a whole, do not compare favorably with any competent palmist. (A competent palmist starts out by telling you various generalities about yourself, a number of which will be startlingly accurate—enough to impress you and make you tend to overlook wrong guesses and significant omissions. The "prophecies" come later. Just how the palmist does it is beside the point.)

Science fiction writers *should be* better prophets than they seem to have been. What's wrong? Well, there are a number of things.

FROM THE time that *Amazing Stories* started using new material instead of "classic" reprints, the scientific competence of the fiction began to decline, while the literary competence—after a rather gruesome transition period—increased. Only a minority of scientists are even tolerably good fiction writers; only a minority of good writers are tolerably competent in any field of science.

2) Most science fiction writers haven't been particularly interested in getting a sound foundation in general science. Of the few that started with it, or who managed to get it nonetheless, only a minority were able to keep up with the latest developments.

3) In the last decade, even

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the most dedicated couldn't keep up with discoveries and developments in their own field, let alone with science in general. Too much basic information is restricted.

4) *All-around,* sound speculation on possible futures, even where the author has sufficient foundation in a wide variety of fields, runs headlong into so many tabus (tacit as well as explicit) that the odds are too great against the author's selling his story. Even if readers were not shocked, or someone important didn't think it was subversive, such stories would be good runners-up to "Finnegans Wake" for incomprehensibility on the mass level. Moreover, it's a very human tendency to assume that when an author indulges in speculations, he is stating his personal beliefs. And the more generally "popular" science fiction becomes, the less rein for free speculation into social effects and possibilities the authors will have.

YET DESPITE all this, I contend that science fiction —"good" science fiction—is mostly "prophecy", or should be. When I say "is prophecy" I mean "has the function of prophecy".

Because, you see, there's another meaning to "prophet" and "prophecy".

The Old Testament prophets, for the most part, did not predict coming events, nor were they trying to. A "prophet" in those days, true, might make an occasional prediction (which, on the basis of a sound appraisal of then-current trends might turn out to be all too accurate), but that wasn't his major function and no one expected it to be. The prophet was an interpreter, an admonisher, an exhorter, a warner, a testifier, a witness. He described fearlessly, and recklessly, how miserable the human moral situation was at present, what in the light of God's laws it ought to be, and what people ought to do about it. He testified to the Law and the Commandents as they had been given; bore witness to the way in which they had been flouted, forgotten, become incrusted with ritual and ceremony that perverted and/or buried their spirit, named names and pointed a finger. His manner was anything but ingratiating, and he was excessively unpopular with the authorities.

Prophets who operate this way usually are. Very few of them know enough science to be aware of the facts of inertia as related to physics, let alone the realities of inertia as related to human behavior. Their empathy rating is close to zero.

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So when I say that I think science fiction should be prophecy in the sense of interpreting science-in-society, in portraying what might be, or should be, based upon sound scientific speculation, I don't mean that science fiction authors should try to be contemporary versions of Isaiah, Jeremiah, or John the Baptist.

WE HAVE learned a little about psychology. We know that if we point a finger at our fellow man, or fellow men as a whole, and give forth with sonorous denunciations—however obvious and true—we're not going to accomplish anything desirable.

When fiction is written with the definite purpose of edifying and uplifting, the result is usually transparent propaganda and poor fiction. It was this approach that made so many of H. G. Wells' later works humorless and tiresome lectures and sermons. They were the type of prophecy that defeats its intentions.

If you want to move a stationary freight car, as Dr. Macklin pointed out, you have to overcome the inertia. Theoretically, you can do it in two ways: you can apply slow, steady pressure, or you can charge into it headlong again and again and again. Actually, if you try the latter method, your head will be homogenized long before there's any perceptible effect upon the freight car.

The writer who takes "science fiction is or should be prophecy" to mean that "science fiction should be written with the purpose of reforming whatever" is using his skull as a battering ram. Let me put it in plain terms: *science fiction should NOT be any kind of propaganda.*

There's a fundamental difference between propaganda and serious entertainment.

Propaganda has a specific purpose: to inculcate specific attitudes and inaugurate specific kinds of action.

Serious entertainment can have the *effect* of making people think. The creator of serious entertainment has worked out various intellectual and emotional ideas as thoroughly and convincingly as he can. He hasn't been lecturing or preaching, even though the effect may be present.

Science fiction is, or should be, s e r i o u s entertainment; when and where it is, the effect will be prophecy.

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illustration by ORBAN

In a sense, Mover and Miss Rose were both seeking the same thing . . .

Fulfillment

by Thomas N. Scortia

(author of "One Small Room")

THE HUNTER *was here!*

In this system!

Mover diffused his tenuous substance through the stone foundations of the old house on Fourteenth Street and rested without form or movement. . . listening only. If he had been capable of thought quite apart from the complex protein molecules and the biochemical energy reactions that he normally activated, he might have been alarmed at the swiftness with which they had found him. As it was he existed as a passive receiver only.

Mover did not think of escape. The concept was completely foreign to his nature. Fulfillment, yes; that was the important object. Fulfillment and completeness. The *android* creatures that his kind had been created to activate were his sole reason for existance, the emotional symbiosis in which he participated his only purpose of being.

There had been a ship, he

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dimly remembered, and another host. Then the sudden blossoming of fire from the engines and the severing of thought from limb as his counterpart dissolved in incandescence.

Vaguely he missed the union of love and hate and subdued chemical passions. Without them there was nothing. But...

In the instant he was aware of that indefinable magnetism, the awareness of vacuum, of need, his essence churned through the porous rock of the house's foundation, seeking. There was no barrier to his passage. He was not really matter, not as one generally understands the term. He was as amorphous as ground mist, shaping himself to the desires of that distant need.

He began to diffuse upward, probing at a distance, emotion by hidden emotion, analysing. At length, satisfied, he rested again, waiting for the exact moment.

He knew that he would not have long to wait.

IT WAS ALWAYS the same, Miss Rose thought. Each weekday there was the delicious monotony of school and moist-eyed, tiny faces staring up at her, pink cheeks flushed, hands fluttering like small birds, never still. And each Thursday evening, the card games with Mrs. Murgeson, the landlady, and Miss Quinn, the other boarder. When Mr. Langtree had been with them, she remembered, they had occasionally played bridge; but Mr. Langtree had moved to Milwaukee three weeks ago, and now there was only herself and the two other women in the old house. Instead of bridge, they sat dully and played innumerable variations of Rummy.

And now this pattern—which was the sum of her life—was soon to shatter about her, she thought with an uneasy wavering of fear.

"My dear," Mrs. Murgeson said in her bull voice, as she completed the seven-card deal, "it must seem strange to look forward after June to sleeping late, and not going to work."

"Although, I confess, I'd feel a little lost, Miss Rose," Miss Quinn said, blinking near-sightedly at her hand. "What do you plan to do? Travel?"

Miss Rose folded her seven cards thoughtfully. "Do?" she said. "Why, I hadn't given it much thought; after all, I've just heard of it. And June is so far away."

"Five months," Mrs. Murgeson said.

Five months! A tiny spark of dread burned briefly in her, and she hurriedly pressed it below the level of her thoughts. Miss Rose had known in a matter-of-fact way, of course, that the inevitable day was approaching; but even the knowledge

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that the County School Board had finally voted on sixty as the compulsory retirement age had not really disturbed the continuity of her life. It was something quite proper, she had supposed, but of no immediate personal consequence.

TODAY, WHEN Miss Benson, the principal, had asked her to drop by after her last class tomorrow, so that they might discuss arrangements for her retirement at the end of the semester, it seemed hardly possible that the day had finally arrived. At first she accepted the idea with the same ease and distant composure with which she had accepted the many times the principalship of Humboldt had passed her by. After all, the second semester had barely started and she could not find it in herself to be alarmed at such a distant event. There was that moment, though—just before the three-thirty bell—when a faint thrill of anxiety had swept over her; but she had mastered the feeling with the calm and weight of years of self-containment.

"It will be an adjustment," Miss Rose admitted. She drew a five of spades from the deck and arranged it with the seven and eight she held. "After thirty-five years," she said, "and thirty-five times forty children."

"Don't tell me you remember them all?" Miss Quinn asked.

Remember? No, Miss Rose thought, children of eight and nine were very much of a kind, with no sufficiently bold character differences to stand out over the years. Even the unusual child, after a lapse of time, blended into the anonymous child mass of thirty-five years.

"No, I can't say that I do," she said. "I honestly don't believe I could name more than a score from those years, and then I'd be hard put to describe them."

Mrs. Murgeson drew from the deck and slapped the card disgustedly on the discard pile.

"As a matter of fact," Miss Rose said, "I suppose I have a sort of superimposed image of all the children I've taught, not that they aren't very real persons while they're in my class."

"With your love for children, I'm surprised you've never married," Miss Quinn said.

"Marry?...Well, there was a time..." Miss Rose smiled self-consciously. There was a time, so long ago...but he was probably married now, and besides, Miss Rose's mother had been so ill at the time that she couldn't leave her.

"YOU KNOW," she said abruptly, "I have a silly little secret that I really shouldn't tell; but over the

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years, I've developed a sort of personal composite in my mind of all the little boys and girls I've taught. I even named them once. The little boy was 'Jimmy'.

"Isn't that a foolish notion?"

"I think it's rather pretty," Miss Quinn said, discarding the ace of spades, which Mrs. Murgeson immediately seized. "Perhaps we all have our own secret ideal people who are blends of the many people we've known and liked."

"Yes," Miss Rose said dreamily, "and Jimmy is such a nice name, don't you think? It has a boyish masculine quality, young and yet strong."

"My sister's husband's name is Jim," Mrs. Murgeson said. "He doesn't like it."

"Rummy," she added, dropping her hand to the table.

MOVER WAITED, the currents of many thoughts flowing through his being. He felt the presence, of the Hunter, and another of the Hunter's race; and the knowledge of their nearness mingled with his awareness of another within the house.

The Hunter was of the race that had constructed Mover's kind, and there had to be a point of contact. That contact for the moment worked in Mover's favor.

"Somewhere..." the near thought came.

"Where?" Far away, light years far away.

"Somewhere near..." Feeling of no knowledge...unease...perhaps, yes, fear... "Biped humanoids...similar body chemistry...capable of the necessary symbiosis..."

A distorting pattern then from the house, trembling, wavering...

"Special conditions...a disintergrating personality for full realization..."

"Find him before..." Urgency, impression of terrible urgency...

And again the pattern near at hand, the emptiness, the need of consummation...

Instinctively, he found the source and probed, emotion by emotion, seeking some point of fusion.

Mover stirred. He began to diffuse through the stone.

Upward.

AS USUAL, the game broke up at eleven and Miss Rose went upstairs to the small sitting room and bedroom that comprised her apartment. For some moments she fussed about the sitting room, eying the ancient oak bookcase with its bubbled green glass doors. A faded print of the Acropolis by moonlight hung above. There was a yellowed normal school diploma, and the brown stained permit from the County Board of Education. She could not say why, but the sight of these brought a sad

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ness that she had never felt before.

After she had turned off the lights, she lay wide-eyed on her side in the half-darkness of the bedroom and stared at the floor beside the bed, seeing the way the yellow moonlight puddled on the worn carpet outlining the uneven boards beneath. The parallel pattern, as she watched, became sharply accented and almost hypnotic in its eye-straining regularity. In the night's stillness the old house was filled with small rustlings and tiny creakings and scurring and...

Suddenly she knew she was not alone!

With the thought came a chill tingling about her limbs, and her heart seemed to fill the room with its violent thumping. She sat up, drawing the thin blanket about her, and waited for some sound from the splotchy darkness. She felt the intangible aura of some secret watcher in the room, and fear seemed to drain the strength from her body.

SHE CALLED out softly, but there was no answer. She fumbled for the lamp beside her. As the shadows retreated from the bed, she sought her slippers with trembling feet and made her way into the sitting room.

But there was nothing.... No one.

As she returned to the bedroom, she thought she heard the faintest whistling—more a sigh of air than anything else—tuneless, and yet reaching for a tune. It was very much, she realized, like the sound of a small boy who has not yet learned how to whistle, and can only make small whooshing sounds.

The thought was somehow pleasant to consider, and she smiled at the image of a round child face frowning over pursed lips from which the desired sound just would not come. She turned out the light and, as she lay staring at the scaling ceiling, the conviction of a second presence returned. She was sleepily surprised to find that she was no longer afraid; and before she could consider the matter further, she slipped easily into slumber, part of her mind following the formless whistle patiently, until she heard nothing more.

FRIDAY morning, Miss Rose awoke with the strangest feeling of time hanging in tight abeyance upon some action of hers. The memory of the previous night was still with her; she knew that if she listened closely, she would still be able to hear that distant whistling. She ate breakfast with Mrs. Murgeson and Miss Quinn, and listened without speaking as the conversation followed devious routes from the price

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of groceries, through the latest experience of Miss Quinn's clairvoyant sister in California, to speculation on the prospective new boarder who had been referred to Mrs. Murgeson, and whom she expected today.

Miss Rose left the house at seven thirty and walked slowly down Fourteenth Street. As she passed the drugstore on the corner, she noticed that someone had scraped the gilt letters that spelled *W. Sommerville, R. Ph.* from the glass door, and she guessed that the rumor she had heard about Mr. Sommerville's selling the store was correct. She arrived at Humboldt at seven forty five.

Her morning was occupied with the routine happenings of a Friday. In the afternoon, she supervised the children in the making of a paper flower basket, without really being fully aware of what was happening about her. When the harsh vibration of the three-thirty bell cut through her reverie, she dismissed the children and watched the scurrying flood of small bodies pour through the cloakroom and into the hall.

Then she went to see Miss Benson, the Principal.

AGAIN AN impression of terrible urgency. Nearer now.

"Can you be sure?" the far thought asked.

"Detection...by effect only."

"...must be sure."

"Yes...as one of them..."

"...the problems...such a masquerade..." ... ...

"...must be done...sure the substitution can't be detected..."

"Find him...horrible, deadly danger...uncontrolled..."

"...but I must be sure..."

The contact shimmered like a heat-distorted image. Amid the fragments eddied the uncontrolled emotions of the host, the anxieties, the inner somesthetic feelings of fear and longing and...

Now there was anticipation.

Mover knew only that there was a need he must fill. That was his function. The presence of the Hunter was unimportant at the moment.

And consummation was near...

THE INTERVIEW with Miss Benson was vague and somehow alarming; Miss Rose had great difficulty in concentrating on what the younger woman was saying. The half-awareness of someone else in the office, and a tiny nagging impatience intruded on her attention; when she finally left the Principal's office, she was not completely sure of any of the arrangements that they had agreed upon.

The walk home was a thin economy of motion. Her feet

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moved with an automaton regularity as she found herself considering the growing constriction of a formless dread in her vitals. She told herself that all this was nonsense; there was no reason for this sudden apprehension about the future. After all, it had to happen someday, and there was much to be said for having one's time entirely one's own after all these years.

As she closed the front door, she heard Mrs. Murgeson's loud fog-horn voice say, "Oh, that must be Miss Rose."

There was a deep masculine rumble.

"Miss Rose," Mrs. Murgeson called.

Miss Rose walked to the door of the living room and said, "Yes?" Mrs. Murgeson was rising from the battered leather chair by the bay window; her companion, a lean, middle-aged man with high sharp cheekbones and oddly-hued brown hair followed her example.

"Come in for a moment," Mrs. Murgeson said. "I want you to meet our new guest." Mrs. Murgeson always called her boarders "guests."

"This is Miss Rose," she said.

Miss Rose said, "How do you do?" and extended her hand.

"Oh," Mrs. Murgeson said, "that wasn't right, was it?... I mean, this is Mr. Hunter, Miss Rose."

MISS ROSE felt a sudden inexplicable flutter of fear; the man looked so cold and menacing. For a moment she felt as if those dark eyes were dissecting her, fiber by fiber. He smiled bleakly as he took her hand awkwardly. For a moment, it appeared as if he were not quite sure of what to do with it. Miss Rose felt in that instant an almost overpowering desire to turn and flee from the room.

"Mr. Hunter's just bought Sommerville's Drug Store," Mrs. Murgeson was saying, "and he'll be with us until he can bring his family east."

"Though, of course," she said, "it'll be Hunter's now... the drug store, I mean."

Mr. Hunter smiled again and said, "That's right," in a low vibrant voice.

Miss Rose made polite noises, and excused herself quickly. As she climbed the stairs, Mrs. Murgeson yelled after her, "Dinner in twenty minutes now."

In her bedroom she deposited her hat on the bureau and secured a towel and washcloth from the top drawer. As she turned, her eyes rested on the bed; she saw the rumpled coverlet and the indentation in the pillow, as if someone had just that moment arisen from an afternoon nap.

Someone quite small, she saw, from the size of the depression in the pillow. A small boy, perhaps.

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Unhurriedly she straightened the coverlet and fluffed the pillow. As she leaned close to the bed she became aware of a faint odor, compounded of soap and perspiration and lingering candy fragrance. It was an odor she had come to know quite well through her years of teaching.

AT DINNER, she ate quite slowly, savoring the growing realization of this thing which a rational part of her insisted could not be. The dinner conversation eddied about her, and she was dimly aware that Miss Quinn had embarked upon a long rambling account of another adventure of her clairvoyant sister.

"What do you think, Miss Rose?" Miss Quinn asked.

"Oh," she said, "I'm sorry; I wasn't really paying close attention."

"I was telling about my sister's experience with a real poltergeist, and Mrs. Murgeson said she didn't see how a spirit or anything else that wasn't material could move material objects."

"Well, I honestly don't know," Miss Rose said.

"Of course," Mr. Hunter said, looking at Miss Rose, "we would have to understand exactly what this spirit was. It's quite possible that there might be other things in the universe that do not conform to our strict ideas of matter and energy."

"Why, yes," Miss Quinn said, brightening, "that's almost exactly what that article in the Sunday paper said last week."

"One might speculate," Mr. Hunter said, "on...say a principle that caused things to happen without having a real independent existance of its own—that is, apart from the matter it activated."

"Oh, posh," Mrs. Murgeson said. "What would you call this thing?"

"As for that," Mr. Hunter said, "why not call it by its function? Why not call it an 'Activator' or, perhaps even better, simply a 'Mover'?"

"Miss Rose," Mrs. Murgeson exclaimed as Miss Rose's fork clattered to her plate, "are you ill?"

"No, no," she said. "I...it felt like a shock from the fork."

Miss Rose moistened her lips and wished that Mr. Hunter would look in the other direction.

"I'm just tired, I guess," she said and excused herself. She climbed the stairs slowly to her apartment, closed the door behind her, and leaned weakly against it. As she turned to key the light switch on the wall, she saw the faint smudge on the cracked white enamel of the door.

It looked very much like the smudge a small boy might

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leave. A small boy whose hands were not too clean.

ALTHOUGH she was usually up before eight on Saturday, Miss Rose did not awaken until ten. She came downstairs and, seeing that Mrs. Murgeson had already left for the market where she did her Saturday shopping, Miss Rose prepared a light breakfast and then returned to her rooms. There was no sign of Mr. Hunter, and she presumed that he was keeping the same hours in the drug store on Saturdays and Sundays as had Mr. Sommerville.

As she usually did on Saturday morning, Miss Rose began to clean and dust her rooms. She ran the dustcloth over the aged furniture and listened to the soft burr of the veined varnish of the oak bookcase under her hand. She rarely dusted the books in the bookcase for the glass doors excluded most of the dirt of the room, but this morning she opened the creaking doors and ran her hands lovingly along the faded volumes in the case, feeling a quiet nostalgia.

On impulse she pulled the copy of "Huckleberry Finn," with its bright red dust cover, from the second shelf and held it lightly in her hand. It was a book she had purchased many years before as a gift for the son of a now-dead friend; but somehow it had found its way to the shelf and had not, she was quite sure, even been cut.

UNDER HER hand, the book seemed to fall open of its own, as if one favorite selection had been read and reread until the spine of the book bore a permanent fold which pulled the pages apart at this section. On the margin of the page, she saw the childish scrawl, written in smudged pencil in bold uneven letters, not at all like her own even mathematical script. She wasn't really surprised, for some volatile alchemy of intuition had already fitted the penciled word into the earlier chain of events, giving it the same feeling of anticlimax that the reception of a calling card gives after one has through a curtained window seen the caller approaching. She easily deciphered the blurred signature.

It said *"Jimmy."*

And that was as it should be, she realized, as the day passed. There was always a hidden compensation in life for dear things lost and, as fantastic as it might seem, this was hers. There was still that part of her analytical self that said, "This is not so," but that objection was easily confounded with the unanswerable reply of, "But it is. Just look and see."

That afternoon she found time for a walk, her body moving for the first time in

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years down the street with a peculiar youthful lightness that filled her with a quiet pleasure. She remembered that she must buy some toothpaste as she approached the drugstore and, feeling somehow defiant of her earlier fears, she entered the store.

SHE SAW Mr. Hunter at the rear counter as she threaded her way through the line of floor displays in the aisle. There were counters bearing heaps of amazing trivia; stacked displays of cherry chocolates; uneasy pyramids of cleansing tissues and paper napkins; a bewildering mechanical jungle of toy tractors; red fire engines; ray guns and bright-painted metal marionettes that rolled hoops, turned sommersaults, beat stiffly on drums, or merely hopped mindlessly from one foot to the other.

She accepted Mr. Hunter's greeting with a nod, thinking of the tight-locked energy contained in those many toy springs on the counter behind her. It gave her a most uncomfortable feeling, a sort of frustration, as though it would be much better if that hidden potential were to burst into kinetic action. She had a mental image for a moment of tiny metal hordes swarming over the counters onto the floors and stiffly conquering the littered aisles. There was a strange satisfaction in the thought.

She heard her voice ask for a tube of toothpaste and she heard Mr. Hunter discuss the merits of the large economy size. She wondered how he would react if she were to say "Look, I have a little boy who's come to stay with me, but you can't see him. His name is Jimmy and I do want you to meet him and tell me he's such a nice little boy." But she knew that this would never do, that rather in some unexplained manner this would be the formula of exorcism; once Mr. Hunter knew of his existence, Jimmy would leave her.

She saw Mr. Hunter looking at her very oddly. His eyes were wide and probing and for a moment she had that same feeling that those eyes were dissecting her cell by cell.

"Miss Rose," he said finally as though he had just reached a decision, "could I speak to you later this evening? Privately?"

"Oh, no," she said, feeling a quick panic. "Oh, no, I won't be home this evening."

"Tomorrow," he insisted. "It must be tomorrow at the latest."

She nodded, not knowing quite how to refuse.

SHE WALKED quickly back to the house. When five o'clock arrived, she washed and went down to din-

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ner. Only Mrs. Murgeson and Miss Quinn were there, and Mrs. Murgeson remarked that Mr. Hunter must be working late. Miss Rose breathed a small sigh of relief. She ate very little and Mrs. Murgeson asked if she were well.

"You look so pale," the landlady said.

"No, no, I'm just not hungry," Miss Rose said.

It was while they were waiting for Mrs. Murgeson to serve dessert that Miss Rose heard the footsteps overhead and she remembered that her sitting room was above the dining room. She must have looked up, for Miss Quinn asked if anything was wrong. As she shook her head, she heard a distant rolling sound like small wheels hitting the boards of the floor above and scraping over their uneven edges. She looked quickly at Miss Quinn, but she did not seem to notice the sound, even though it was quite loud.

"I'm not feeling very well after all," she said and rose from her chair. As she left the room, she heard Mrs. Murgeson enter with the dessert and she called from the stairs that it wasn't anything, just a headache, and she was going to lie down.

When she entered, there was no one in the sitting room. It was several moments before she noticed the toy fire truck in the far corner of the room. It was lying on its side, and one black wooden wheel was still spinning lazily.

FOLLOWING the tropism of his kind, Mover blended himself with the image the host had created, seeking only final fusion, complete realization.

Now he could feel fear. The decaying personality of the host echoed it.

And there was the menace of the Hunter.

And the thought from afar that told the Hunter, "Hurry...hurry...before it is too late..."

And again the feeling of menace...

Menace that must be dealt with, before...

REMEMBERING her promise to Mr. Hunter that Sunday morning, she wondered how she might avoid him. She went out early and bought two wrapped sandwiches, and a bottle of soda, so that she would not have to appear for dinner. She spent the remainder of the morning in her apartment, floating in a kind of delicious reverie without thought.

At noon, Mrs. Murgeson called up the stairs to tell her that dinner was ready. When she did not answer, she heard heavy footsteps and a moment later a knock on her door. Smothering her annoyance, Miss Rose let the woman in and explained that she was not at all hungry and that

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she might come down for a snack later in the afternoon.

She did not ask Mrs. Murgeson if she heard the soft footsteps in the next room, or if she saw the drapes of the connecting doorway sway as they would if a shy small boy were peering out at a visitor, and fearful of discovery.

After Mrs. Murgeson had left, Miss Rose napped for awhile in the bedroom until the knock on the door awakened her. She lay very still, hearing the heavy breathing on the other side of the door. For a moment she feared he might try the knob, but then she heard the heavy sound of footsteps retreating to his room. Shortly thereafter, she heard him descend the stairs and she heard the front door open and close.

She went into the sitting room and sat in the upholstered chair near the window. It was a moment before the warmth registered as she rested her sleeveless arm against the smooth fabric of the chair back, but then she realized that there was a discrete patch of cloth which held a lingering body heat at just about the level of a small boy's head. As she leaned back and closed her eyes, the strangest other-world feeling of pleasant lassitude invaded her arms and legs and for the briefest finger-pinch of an instant, she felt the light brush of fingers on her lips.

SHE KNEW then that this most precious invisible presence existed insubstantially before the menace of the outside world. A new feeling of freedom and completeness held her; she felt an unexplainable hatred for the world, and particularly for Mr. Hunter with his insistent presence. She knew then that only he was a real danger to her and to Jimmy.

She rose, pulled on her light coat and left the house without a hat. On the way to the drugstore, she felt warm and p u l s a t i n g amid the scents of gestating spring that swirled about her in tightening f i l a m e n t s. She heard the distant sound of auto horns and she heard the cries of playing children and occasionally she could feel the brushing touch of a small hand on hers.

She saw Mr. Hunter before the store, rolling up the candy-striped awning and heard his greeting; but a muffling barrier seemed to blot out his words. When he asked her how her nephew had liked the toy fire truck she had bought the day before, she could only shake her head in confusion. She heard him invite her into the deserted store and she moved past his colorless figure silently.

"Of c o u r s e, you must know..." she heard him saying and, "There's nothing to be frightened about now..."

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but the words were meaningless syllables.

"...had to find you...host destroyed with the ship off the moon...an emotional symbiote ... terribly dangerous uncontrolled..."

"Now," he said, "I can easily..." and there was an hiatus in which she was aware of moving and then...

SHE WAS winding all of the toys on the counter and tripping their levers, feeling a tense joy at setting so many beings moving at once. She saw the slowly grinding tractors move across the floor and she watched a mechanical kangaroo make idiot flopping hops until it collided with a metal soldier that beat its drum and marched in endless circles. The soldier pushed the kangaroo aside and continued on its march, its tiny steel feet making red tracks on the dirty floor as it retraced its steps again and again through the widening pool of liquid that spread from Mr. Hunter's prone figure.

She walked from the store, and her steps led her to the house, in the hall, an unimportant figure said evening meal would be ready in a few minutes and she deposited her coat on the bed and went downstairs. There was a table, and human objects about it whose features were hewed in painful detail; but the items of those features, the inventory of chin and eye and nose and moving lip failed to register except as a meaningless jumble. She ate, and she heard a voice from the shifting angles and planes of light speak to her but she managed to leave the table without answering and walk through the morass of shadows in the hall and on the stairs to her rooms.

The walls of the apartment were suddenly close and warm and, as she sat in the chair by the window, Jimmy came and sat on the arm and his small warm hand was on her face and his small voice said, "Never mind. Now there's only you and me."

SHE HEARD the far shuffling in the hall and Miss Quinn saying that she hoped Miss Rose was all right; there was the sound of a key in the door and she felt the aura that was Miss Rose retreat before the knife-edge yellow light that streamed into the room.

"Go away," she sobbed. "I don't want any of you again... Ever."

And it was done.

Like an inturning spiral, consciousness became a hard kernel outside of which nothing existed and she heard him say, "That was fine and now I can be with you forever..."

She heard Mrs. Murgeson say, "We'd better call the doctor." Then even that was

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lost in the wash of soft waves that swept over her and she was enfolded in a yielding gelatinous blackness that compressed her essential self into a tiny knot, sealing off all light, all awareness of any stimulus outside the sharp boundaries of her tingling body . . . And there was the little boy odor in her nostrils and the thin corded little boy arms about her, and the high little boy voice, growing ever louder, saying, "And I'll be with you forever and ever and ever, and . . ."

THE LAST WORD

Dear Bob:

I want you to know that Randy Garrett's illustration for my "How To Succeed At Science Fiction Without Really Trying" was terrific. I've gone over it half a dozen times and found something new each time. Furthermore, he catches my spirit in that caricature of me, my bow-tie, my double-chin, the fiendish glitter in my eyes, my grin, etc.

Only one thing: I don't keep ten dollar bills lying around on my desk and under books. I bale them neatly and stow them in my study closet.

—ISAAC ASIMOV

Dear Bob:

How do you do. I'm Roger Weir.

In my opinion, sir, SFS has become an example of what a S. F. magazine can, with a good editor at the helm, bring itself up to.

Issue after issue *Science Fiction Stories* has shown small but steady improvements. The Sept. 1956 issue of SFS is right here beside me, and beside it is the Sept. 1955 issue of SFS. Improvement: sixteen more pages, better percentage of enjoyable stories, covers are both good.

I am finding Simak's stories some of the best now being written. He is at the present time in the 8th place in my rating of the ten top S.F. writers. Ted Sturgeon is number 7.

I have nearly all 1937, 1938 and 1939 issues of *National Geographic Magazine* that I

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illustration by Orban

The guard's back was turned.

The strangest thing about what seemed to be a needlessly brutal regulation was that no one could think of an instance in which it actually been applied!

THE INNOCENTS' REFUGE

by Theodore L. Thomas

(Author of "Trial Without Combat")

THE DOOR slid shut behind him and he leaned against it, his head tilted back, his breath sounding loud in the stillness of the house.

The woman stepped into the hall and saw him against the door. Silently she crossed the hall and flung herself on him. His arms encircled her and he pressed her to his breast.

For a long moment the two stood holding each other. And then side by side but still clinging together they walked into the great room. Gently he placed her on a divan. He cupped her chin in his hand and tipped her head up and

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looked into her tear-dimmed eyes. His other hand stroked the shimmering waves of golden hair that fell across her shoulders.

"It is all right," he said. "Lyon is in good hands; they will take good care of him."

She tried to smile but could not; instead the tears came again. She struggled to her feet and said, half-crying, "Why must they do this to us? Why must they take my baby away? Have they no heart? Have they no understanding?"

HE SLIPPED an arm around her shoulders and said, "Yes, my darling, they have. But our little boy was—well, you know how he was. There is no place for him in our civilization."

"No place." She spat the words. "How do they know? He was only two weeks old; he was a fine, strapping handsome baby boy. How can they be sure he was—he was different.

He dropped his arm from around her and said, "My darling, we have been over this before. They can tell; they do not make mistakes. His brain is just not there. Much of it is missing and can never grow in. No, my dear; there can be no doubt that our child was subnormal."

She raised her head and said, "I don't care. He is my baby, and I would have taken care of him if they had let me. Why do they want to kill him? It wasn't his fault."

He passed his hand across his face. "I know," he said, "And I feel much as you do. But they have reasons. They said that our boy couldn't begin to cope with the problem of modern living. Someone would have to watch him every minute of his life. If you and I were to care for him, we would have time for little else. We would grow embittered, resentful of a society into which our son could not fit. So they say it is better for us to be hurt sharply now than to watch our child grow up."

"I don't care what they say. After forty thousand years of civilization I still think they are beasts. I am glad you have taken Lyon where they can not get him and murder him."

HE SLOWLY took off his robe and tossed it over the divan. He walked to a glass wall and gazed out into the deep night. "You know," he said softly, "I had the strangest feeling tonight when I took Lyon back; I had the feeling that the way was being smoothed for me. It was uncanny."

She sat down on the divan and said, "What do you mean?"

"Well, I am not certain. But everything happened for my benefit. The guards around the Time Machine

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were unusually lax. Just before I got in, Lyon began to cry. You know how loud his cry is, but the guards fifty feet away didn't even seem to hear it. Furthermore, the machine had already been warmed up; all I had to do was give the dial a random spin and hit the switch. And coming back was the same thing. The guards never happened to look where I was hiding when I came out of the building. It shouldn't be that easy; those Time Machines are the best guarded things in the country.

She looked at him quietly for a moment. "Well, what do you think it means?"

"I don't know," he said. He stared out into the night and then continued. "Now that I've been through it, everything is beginning to make sense." He turned to face her. "Look. A subnormal child—let's face it, an idiot—is born once in about ten million births. The policy states that they should be put to sleep. But have we ever heard of that happening?"

She stiffened at the word *idiot*, but she said simply, "No."

"On the other hand, everyone *has* heard how the parents of those children take them back in time in the Machine, and leave the child among the primitives. Yet no one has ever heard of any citizens being able to use the Machine for any other purpose. Now doesn't that seem strange?"

SLOWLY she nodded. "Yes. It does. Do you—do you think—is it on purpose?"

"I don't know." He began pacing about the spacious room. "Look. No one knows except us, and the doctors, that our child was not normal. We certainly will never tell anyone what we have done, except our close friends. It must be the same with other parents. Well then, why is it that this particular use of the Time Machine is so widely known? There are so few subnormal children that you would think no one would know of it. And when you balance that with the fact that an ordinary fellow like me can walk into the most closely-guarded Machine on Earth, use it, and walk out again—darling, you *must* be right. They let me do it so that they would not have to put Lyon to sleep. They are on our side after all." And he swiftly crossed to her side and swept her up in his arms.

She held him tightly, then suddenly pushed him away. "But why? Why torment us this way? Why make us think they want to kill our baby? All they need do is tell everybody that subnormal children will be sent back in time to the primitives. Why must they cause such anguish?"

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HE DROPPED his arms and stepped away and pulled reflectively at his lower lip. He said, "That is right; there seems no need—wait." He stepped up to her and grasped her shoulders and looked into her eyes. "Tell me. If Lyon were not faced with death, would you agree to sending him back to the primitives? Think, now; would you?"

Her head fell and she stared at the floor. Finally she shook her head. "No," she said. "No. It is too uncertain. The primitives are idiots themselves—savages, too. I know too little about them for me to agree to send my child back among them. No, I would never agree unless my child were faced with death."

He dropped his hands and smiled at her. "That is the answer, my darling. By pretending to want to destroy our subnormal children, they made it possible for us to achieve the courage to send our child back to the ancient peoples."

Wearily he sat down and leaned back and closed his eyes. She sat alongside him and gently pulled his head to her shoulder. "I feel much better," she said softly. "Even though our Lyon must grow up among savages, it can't be so bad. They are not so much his mental superiors that they will harm him. He should be able to hold his own in their civilization."

"Yes, my darling," he said sleepily. "I'm certain he will. I saw his foster parents during the hour I was there. They seemed to love our little Lyon almost as much as we do. In fact they were so impressed with his fine strong body that they are going to keep his first name. They are going to call him Leonardo—Leonardo da Vinci."

★

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An unusual tale of tomorrow

SOLITARY by Robert Silverberg

An Absorbing Novelet

MADE TO ORDER by Frank Belknap Long

These, and many others, will be featured in the big **Issue Number 32** *of*

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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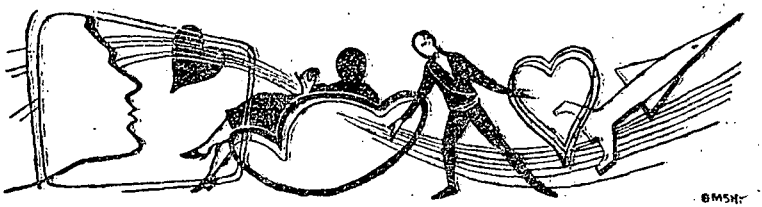

A Department For The
Science - Fictionist

INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION

Reports and Reminiscences

By Robert A. Madle

WHEN HUGO GERNSBACK formed the Science Fiction League back in 1934, one of the first to rally to the cause was the Los Angeles group, forming a local chapter of the League. Now, more than twenty years later, this club is on the brink of 1000. Yes, by the time this is printed, the Los Angeles Science-Fantasy Society will have celebrated its 1000th meeting—a science fiction club record which will prove quite difficult to surpass.

Fans in the L.A. area who are not members of this, the oldest stf club extant, will do well to investigate its activities by attending a meeting, most of which are frequented by prominent writers in the field. For instance, at the most recent gathering, Sam Merwin Jr. was the guest speaker. Merwin, who also writes under the names of Matt Lee and Carter Sprague, and who has been connected editorially with *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Startling Stories*, *Galaxy* and the new

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Satellite, reminisced extemporaneously about the demise of Sgt. Saturn and answered many questions about the magazine publishing business. Among the other writers present were Mark Clifton, Frank Quattrocchi, Frank Riley, Helen Urban and Kris Neville.

A postcard addressed to Forrest J. Ackerman will bring you details of future meetings. His address is 915 S. Sherbourne Drive, Los Angeles 35.

BACK IN 1910, Hugo Gernsback wrote a novel which has become a landmark in science fiction history—*"Ralph 124C41 Plus."* In this novel, Gernsback visualized the world of the future and, among numerous other extrapolations on 1910 science, conceived of a combination telephone-television Now it has been announced by Bell Telephone Company that such a gadget is probability for the near future. They already have the working model perfected, the screen of which, however, is quite small—merely two by three inches. Before Bell goes into production, they plan to initiate an attitude survey to discover if such a gadget will be popular with a sufficient number of telephone users to make it practicable to commence large-scale manufacturing.

TODAY THE trend is away from colonialism, and we read daily of many downtrodden areas either receiving their independence as a grant from their colonial rulers, or taking some of their own volition. Now the President of the American Rocket Society, speaking before an astronautical congress in Rome, has laid down the rules of conduct we should observe when landing upon another planet. No flag-raising or colonizing should be practiced—and we certainly should not land upon Mars or Venus as would-be conquerors. It is not too early to give such matters some thought and, as the editor of the *Cleveland Press* commented. "We have, and are justly proud of, our Bill of Rights. It ought to go right along with us into space."

Another delegate to the same International Astronautical Conference, Argentina's top-ranking scientist, Teofilo Tabanera, says that man can reach the moon in twenty years at the most, if we make any sort of concerted effort to get there. The effort, however, will have to be primarily financial, says Mr. Tabanera. And, along the same line as the statements of President Andrew G. Haley, Mr. Tabanera said, "Space should belong to everyone. Venus and Mars should not

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belong to any one nation." Among the 400 delegates present was Professor Fred Whipple of Harvard. Professor Whipple is responsible for the latest concept of the universe which makes it almost double the previously conceived size.

THE 1957 Transatlantic Fan Fund is now getting into full operation. Donald E. Ford informs us that eight American s-f fans have been nominated, one of whom will be voted the official representative of American science fiction to attend the 1957 London World Science Fiction Convention. Those nominated are Forrest J. Ackerman, George Nims Raybin, Stuart Hoffman, Ed McNulty, Dick Ellington, Dick Eney, Boyd Raeburn, and Robert A. Madle. The one receiving the most votes from qualified members of the science fiction world will receive an expense-paid round-trip to London, and will have the honor and privilege of representing all of American fandom. Information concerning the TAFF fund can be obtained by writing to Don Ford, Box 19-T, RR 2, Wards Corner Road, Loveland, Ohio.

And while we're on the subject of the London World Convention, let's not forget to get your membership in as soon as possible. The committee is working hard to make this, the first *real* world convention, a big success. All advance information and progress reports will be sent to members, along with an attractive membership card. The fee is only $1 this time and the address is 204 Wellmeadow Road, Catford, London, SE6, England.

IMMEDIATELY following the New York convention of 1956, a writer's conference was held in Milford, Pa., sponsored by Damon Knight, Cyril Kornbluth and others. This year, following the London affair, the "Biggercon" will be held—in Germany! It will be known as the "Big German Convention," and will be sponsored by the Science Fiction Club, "Deutschland," led by Walter Ernsting, rabid German fan. Forrest J. Ackerman, who is Honorary President of the German group, will be Guest of Honor. Forry was previously Guest of Honor at the First International S-F Convention of 1951, held in London.

THE FANZINES

SCIENCE FICTION PARADE (10¢ a copy from Len J. Moffat, 5969 Lanto St., Bell Gardens, California). *Parade*, a newcomer, is a magazine which can unhesitatingly be recommended to the "outer-circle" reader—that reader whose knowledge of fandom is slight or non-existant. It is

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a well-mimeographed publication, covering the entire field of science fiction. Ron Ellik pens an interesting report on the recent New York World Convention—"Nycon II—Floperoo?" As can be deduced from the title, Mr. Ellik did not wax enthusiastic in his reporting; but even so, he still had a few nice things to say about the convention. From personal experience, it can be stated that sponsoring a world convention is a vast and complex operation—subject to many heartaches and disappointments. It is a job which we would, personally, prefer to have nothing to do with in the future. However, conversely, there is nothing we like better than to *attend* a convention after all the work has been done.

A regular feature in *Parade* is George W. Fields' "Prozines on Parade," a column devoted to criticism of current issues of the various magazines. Mr. Fields usually devotes his time to what he calls the top seven—*Astounding, Fantasy & SF, Galaxy, Infinity, IF, Fantastic Universe,* and *Original Science Fiction Stories.* We've mentioned this before, but it bears repeating. Columns of this nature are not overly-abundant in the amateur s-f field, and we're glad to see several of the publications feature them. After all, they are *science fiction* fan magazines.

There are several other regular features, such as film and fanzine reviews, as well as an occasional book review. *Parade* is the type of fanzine which is a requisite if more general readers are to be brought from the nacrocosm into the microcosm, and it is hoped that its circulation zooms ever-upwards.

SATA ILLUSTRATED (10¢ for a sample from Don Adkins, PO Box 258, Luke Air Force Base, Glendale, Arizona). There are various types of fan publications issued with some degree of regularity. *Parade*, reviewed above, is primarily a news and discussion magazine. Then there is the type which features articles on various facets of s-f, sometimes offering an occasional short story as part of its fare. There is also the complete newszine, and there have been fanzines devoted exclusively to fiction—although the latter type has met with little success because the fiction published was, in many cases, not worth publishing. We now have a fanzine which exists, from all intents and purposes, to popularize the artwork of its very talented editor, Dan Adkins. Previous issues of *Sata* published a general potpouri of material, but this issue it is primarily a "picturezine." In fact, Adkins anonunced that the current issue would be of

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a type never before issued. He had planned to turn *Sata* into an all-art magazine, but, after partially completing this issue, decided against it. (As an aside, we would like to mention that even if Adkins *had* fulfilled his original plan, *Sata* would *not* have been the first all artzine. Back in 1939, John V. Baltadonis—then known as the "Paul of the Fan Artists,"—published several issues of *Fantasy Pictorial* which, we believe, *was* the only all art fanzine.)

The current *Sata* contains several full-page drawings, with the remainder of the issue being consumed primarily by a readable short story, "The Martian Bauble," by Charles L. Morris. At any rate, the story is replete with well-done illos by Adkins, depicting the ironic fate which befalls three Martian explorers. There is also an article on Elvis Pressly which, it is felt, is somewhat incongruous in *Sata*. Published via the Ditto process, *Sata* is a kaleidoscope of color an an example of what can be done with this process when it is adeptly utilized.

CRY OF THE NAMELESS (10¢, $1 a dozen, from Wally Weber, Box 92, 920 3rd Avenue, Seattle 4, Washington). Now in its ninety-fourth issue, *Cry* is the publication of The Nameless Ones, the Seattle science fiction club. (Interested parties are cordially invited to write Weber for information concerning the club.) Again we have what is a comparative rarity, a magazine which is devoted primarily to the "prozine" field. In each issue *Cry* publishes Renfrew Pemberton's "Science Fiction Field Plowed Under," which critically analyzes the latest issues of s-f magazines. Pemberton's wife, Amelia, takes the fanzines apart, while Burnett R. Toskey is in the midst of writing a history of *Amazing Stories*. Terming this a "history," is somewhat inaccurate, for each installment consists of Toskey's opinion of a single year of *Amazing Stories*. This time the year 1936 is analyzed. There is also an "S-F Report," in which all of the members pool their opinions, and a rating guide for all s-f magazines is evolved. Those of you who have insufficient time to read *all* of the s-f published could merely pick out the A's and B's from this monthly list and probably read most of the better stories.

NITE CRY (10¢ from Don Chappell, 547 S. 79th Avenue E., Tulsa, Oklahoma). This little mimeod zine is issued primarily for members of the *Fantasy Amateur Press Association* (FAPA), a magazine interchange group, but

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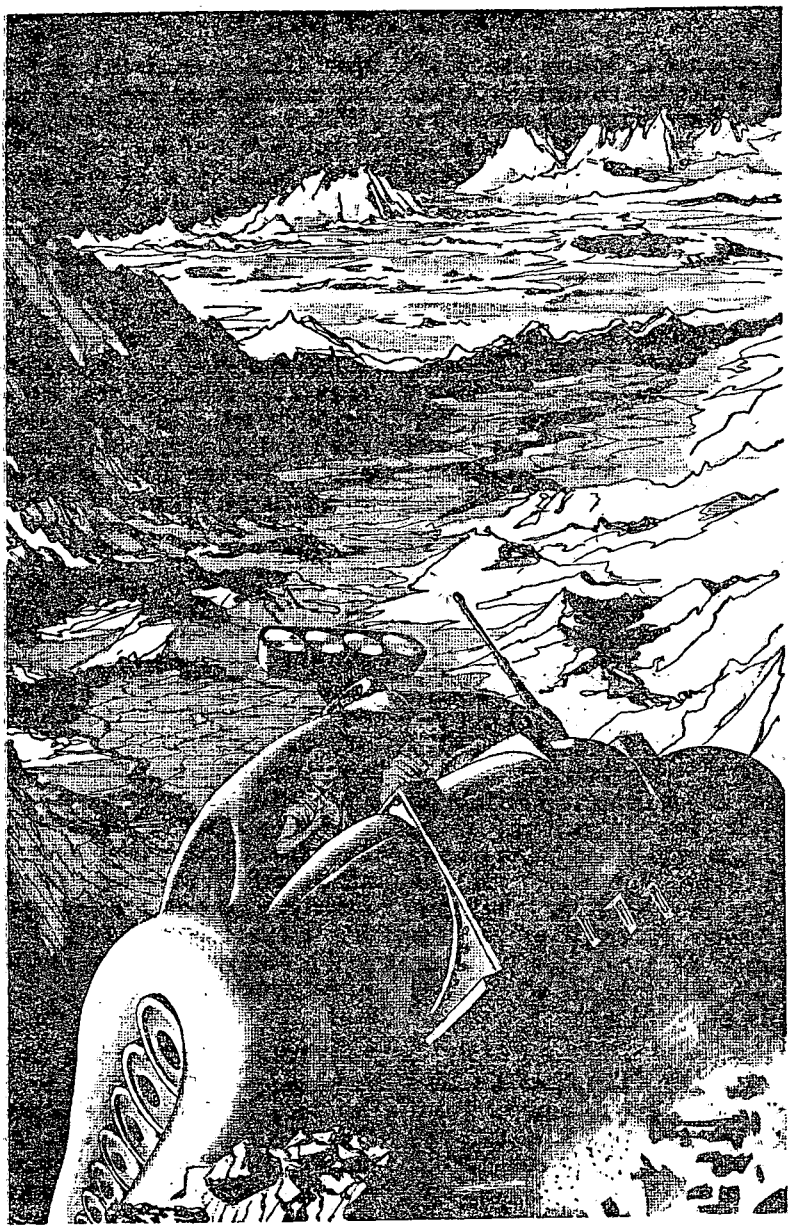

The bleak surface of the moon didn't change from century to century...

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EXTRA SPACE PERCEPTION

Novelet by Russ Winterbotham

(author of "Time's A Gorilla")

Telepathy, in itself, is far from a new theme in science-fiction; but since no one is quite sure exactly how it would work, new ideas are always springing up. We think you'll find the present story's slant on the subject both fascinating and convincing on its own terms.

A SCRAWNY, shriveled-faced crater digger named Mike Lorraine left a couple of odd-looking rocks at the *Casa Conon,* and as a result the moon was crazier than than yesterday's mistakes.

The rocks were shaped like a pair of dice; in fact, they were dice. And there was nothing odd in leaving a pair of dice at the *Casa Conon,* because this was the moon's ritziest gambling casino, where tourists from earth defied boldly what Ace Crosbi called percentage.

Ace knew the dice were odd in the same way people seem to sense all kinds of things on the moon. Ace measured the cubes with calipers. He gave them balance tests and he stared at them till he almost fell asleep. Every last measurement said they were true, but when Ace threw the dice, they turned up exactly what he was thinking. When he didn't think, they turned up ace-ace, which was Ace himself. He'd never seen anything like it.

Ace left his office, lock-

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ing the door behind it. He walked to the far corner of the mezzanine of his casino and passed into an inconspicuous corridor that led toward a door of solid, glassy basalt. Ace walked with the peculiar glide of men who had long lived on the moon. In fact, Ace had been born in Crater Conon, where *Casa Conon* was located, and twelve generations of moon dwellers lay behind him. It was Ace's ancestors who had colonized the crater, capped it and help build it into the little metropolis it is today. Only then it wasn't a tourist resort; men went to the moon to mine and explore and grow rich from lunar resources.

It had taken Ace's father to discover that there were easier ways to prosper. And so Crater Conon blossomed forth with fine hotels, gaming palaces, and even mineral baths kept fresh by repurifying precious water. From Crater Conon, caravans of pressure cars took sight-seers through the Lunar Alps, to see the sealed caverns where miners worked their lives away. Other safaris sometimes headed south and eastward across Sinus Medii to Copernicus and Lansberg, where a magnificent observatory had been set up on the lunar equator. And once each lunar day—which, of course, meant a terrestrial month—a really deluxe caravan made a tour around the moon.

IN ALL these things Ace Crosbi shared the profits. He had stock in every lunar enterprise that attracted tourists. Ace was the Moon's host. He welcomed the famous and the humble, and took their money graciously. In doing so, he became many things to many men—a crook, a cheat, a shrewd business man, a genius. Actually, Ace was none of these things. He was a moon man, with a philosophy that had grown up with a crazy world. He kept his games scrupulously honest at *Casa Conon*. He directed his safaris so that anyone, from scientist to giddy debutante, would enjoy some part of it. He put medical men in charge of his mineral baths, and his hotels were the best in the solar system. Perhaps his food was not so good, but fresh food is seen seldom on the moon. However, when the Moon Nike brought fresh food, Ace's hotels served it.

While people called Ace many things—some complimentary, some not—few people realized that he was a scientist. His science was humanity, whether it came from the earth, or was bred on the moon. He had inherited his wealth only five years ago, at the age of twenty-two. His father had died while Ace was in college on the earth.

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Instead of completing his work, Ace took the Nike back to Mare Vaporum and Crater Conon.

Reaching the door, Ace put his key to the lock. There was only one key to this door, although it could be opened from the inside.

As he turned the key, a buzzing alarm sounded beyond the door. Ace called softly: "Ace Crosbi, coming in."

Then he pushed the door and as it swung, he looked straight into the muzzle of a snub-nosed pistol. Behind the gun was a swarthy, black haired man, who was slightly overweight.

"Put that thing away, Dag," said Ace.

Dag Scanlon grinned. Another young man, of slender build, but with cold black eyes, turned away from the lattice work that overlooked the *Casa Conon's* game room entrance and nodded to Ace: "Hello, Ace."

This little room, only a few feet square, was Ace's protection against the lack of law in Crater Conon.

"Didn't you know it was I, Dag?" Ace said after nodding to the slender youth, whose name was Zack Wood.

"I had a hunch, but I don't take no chances."

"You learn to know those hunches on the moon," said Ace. He looked old for his years as he seated himself in the chair beside a table on which Scanlon was cleaning a sub-machinegun.

ACE KNEW it was useless to attempt to explain Esp to Scanlon. Extra sensory perception would have been received with the same incredulity that Dag gave everything but his paycheck, his hourly shot of whisky and Myrna, the housegirl who operated the chuck-luck game. This trinity was the total of Dag's reality, save his ability to fight for those things; everything else was dream-stuff.

How could Ace explain telepathy to a man who wrote it off as a hunch? Telepathy did take a little skill, though, and it was vaguely possible that it would always remain impossible for Dag Scanlon.

"Did you ever feel as though someone was peeking into your brain, Dag?" Ace asked.

Scanlon scratched his head. "I guess nobody'd see much if they did."

"You can say that again," put in Sabine.

Dag laughed, because it was a good joke. He was never insulted at anything Zack or Ace or any of the night guards of *Casa Conon* said to him. As a matter of fact, Wood hadn't meant to be insulting; that was his idea of humor, too.

"But if they looked in *your* brain, boss—" Scanlon went on, looking at Crosbi.

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"P o d u s osculation is not what you're paid for, Dag," said Ace.

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelin's, boss," said Scanlon, sensing that the words Ace used meant that he had said something wrong. "All I meant is that you went to school on earth. You're a brain!"

"And so I waste a good education running a high class crap game on the moon."

"Well, it's an honest game."

"TELL ME about the hunch, Dag," Ace said. "What made you think it was me?"

"I knew even before you said your name, boss, but I don't trust even a hunch. It just came to me: 'Here comes Ace, and he's mad about somethin'.' Are you mad, boss? What's eatin' you?"

"A little old scarecrow of a miner's trying to pull something, and I can't figure his angle."

Wood turned away from the lattice work. "I don't like the looks of that fellow down there, boss."

Ace rose and went to the lattice. Just inside the entrance locks of the game room stood a young man in a plaid tuxedo. He was about Crosbi's slender build, but a little taller. His bearing was that of a man who believed that nothing was quite good enough for his taste. He had a supercilious, half-amused smile on his lips, a patronizing stare in his eyes as he surveyed the three crap tabels, the roulette table, and the chuck-luck bird cage. It was early, and only the roulette table and one crap game was in operation.

The young man lit a cigaret and walked toward one of the cashier's cages. From his glide it was easy to see that he had spent many years on the moon. Earthmen bound with each step, never seeming quite able to control their muscles which are in tune with a much greater weight and gravitational attraction.

"Why don't you like him?" Crosbi asked, squinting at the young man.

"Just a feeling I got," said Zack Wood. "Maybe the look in his eye, like he was up to no good."

"I got it, too," said Crosbi. And he knew why; the man was here to pull something.

TELEPATHY isn't words. You don't get a sentence, or a thought, when you read someone's mind; you get an impression. It's not spread out so that you can read it, it is a slap in the brain. After a little practice, a person learns to analyze the different feelings. He can distinguish an emotion from a fact and an idea from a sneer. But it took no expert to Esp this man. He hated everybody and he was looking for Ace Cros-

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bi in particular; Crosbi had the feeling that he was very important in that young man's mind right then.

"Ever see him before?"

Wood shook his head. "Not a regular, anyhow; and not a tourist, judging from his walk. Maybe he's from the Alps. They've got quite a settlement around the tin mines down there. Some talk about capping Calippus. If they did, we'd have competition. Anyhow this guy's new to me. And he's up to no-good monkeyshines."

Scanlon was pouring himself a drink. It was nine o'clock. Every hour, on the hour, Ace allowed Dag one drink—and that was all that Scanlon took. Dag was an obedient employee.

As he finished, the telephone rang. Scanlon took the phone from a wall hook and answered. He held the instrument out to Crosbi: "For you."

Ace took the phone. "Hello..."

Higgins said a young man named Judd Beecher wanted to see Crosbi, and wouldn't take no for an answer. "Says it's business. Shall I call one of the boys?"

"Ever seen him before?"

"No. Not that I recall. But he's a mooner."

"Find out what his business is, and if it's legit, send him up." Ace waited and finally Higgins came back on the phone.

"He says he's a gambler."

"So's everybody; but send him up anyhow."

Ace replaced the phone and turned to Scanlon. "The young fellow that Zack and I didn't like is coming up to see me. He may be okay, but I've got one of your hunches that he's not. Don't be far away, in case I need you."

"Okay, Ace."

"Another thing, if you see a dried-up little miner hanging around the mezzanine, sit on him till I have a chance to talk to him."

"Sure thing."

THE YOUNG man in the plaid tux stood at the door of Aces office, looking at Crosbi as if he had just vomited.

"I'm Ace Crosbi," said the gambler as he came to a stop in front of the young man.

The young man extended his palm with an oh-hell attitude. "I'm Judd Beecher."

Ace took the limp hand, noted that it had no calousses; Beecher might be a gambler at that. Certainly this fellow was not a miner.

"I'd like to talk business with you privately, if you can spare a few moments."

"Certainly," said Ace. "But my business will pick up in an hour or so, and I have things to do. So make it short."

Crosbi took his keys from his pocket and unlocked his office door. He waved his

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guest through, then followed him. Before closing the door, Ace let his eyes travel to the far corner of the lounge and he saw Dag Scanlon's bulky figure emerging from the little corridor.

Crosbi invited the visitor to be seated in a chair across from the desk, and Ace sat down behind the desk. Ace offered the young man a cigar, then a cigaret, and the young man refused both.

"Then what's your business?" Ace inquired, settling back into his chair. "Do you have a new game to sell, or do you want a job?"

"Neither," said the young man. "I'll come right to the point, though. I want to buy *Casa Conon*."

ACE'S FACE did not change expression. "You're wasting your time. I won't say the place isn't for sale, but I doubt if you've enough money to buy it."

"You didn't mention a price," said Beecher. "It might be that I have enough money."

"One million, five hundred thousand credits," said Crosbi. "My bottom price."

"A little high, but no doubt fair. I'll take it."

Ace stared in disbelief at Judd Beecher. "You're crazy; and so am I, for even mentioning a price. *Casa Conon* isn't for sale for any price. If I sold it, I'd have nothing to do; I might even have to go to work."

As Crosbi spoke, his eyes fastened on a small glittering ornament, a stud in the front of Beecher's shirt. It gleamed with a brown, amber colored light that spelled caution. Ace was familiar with the material, for the dice that Mike Sublette had left with him were made of it.

"Would you have it said that you agreed to sell this place and chickened out?" Beecher spoke disdainfully, but somehow it didn't make Crosbi angry. "What if it is worth a few credits less than you asked? Surely you don't care if I want to squander my money!"

"I won't sell!" Ace spoke with less emphasis now.

"Two million," said Beecher. "Think! You could go to Earth and retire!"

"I want to live on the moon!"

"You can live here." Beecher's voice seemed far off and distant, like a voice in a dream. "I can see you are tired of working, Mr. Crosbi. You need a rest. Why don't you put your head down on your desk and go to sleep while I take the money out of my wallet. I also have the papers for you to sign. Sleep, Crosbi. Sleep." Crosbi's head lowered itself to his arms on the desk. Somewhere, deep in his subconscious was the feeling that he shouldn't, but Ace did not heed. He even wanted

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to sell *Casa Conon*—after he slept.

He was conscious of the young man opening a wallet and putting two stacks of bills on the table. "A million in each pile," said Judd Beecher. "Now here are the papers—"

ACE CROSBI heard an explosion; his subsconscious caught hold and dragged him back. His eyes focussed on the two piles of bills, but they weren't bills. They were little flat discs made of amber crystal.

And the explosion had been the violent opening of Crosbi's office door. In the doorway was Dag Scanlon, holding his little pistol in his hand. Beecher rose, unruffled, and faced Dag.

"Your time's up, wise guy," said Scanlon. "The boss has got a busy night and he can't waste it on jerks."

Judd Beecher disregarded the gun. His voice was soft as velvet. "Doesn't that heavy thing in your hand make you feel tired? Why don't you put it down? I'll bet Crosbi works you to death—"

Scanlon's little eyes were focussed on Judd Beecher's shirt front.

Crosbi's subconscious mind yelled again. Ace rose suddenly, reached across the desk and grabbed Beecher's shoulder. Whirling the young man around, his fingers reached out and seized the ambercolored stud and tore it away; then he dropped the object in his desk drawer.

Judd Beecher smiled disdainfully. "Are you sure you've changed your mind about selling, Mr. Crosbi?" he asked. "If you're smart, you'll sell to avoid additional overhead." He paused and laughed. "Perhaps that's the wrong term; it should be underground. You might be underground if you persist in this stubborn attitude."

"Scram," said Dag, who had ceased feeling tired.

JUDD BEECHER smoothed the wrinkles in his jacket and straightened his shoulders as he turned to face Scanlon. "You're part of the underground overhead too. Two funerals at one time."

"Get out, or it's your funeral," said Crosbi.

Beecher shrugged and walked straight toward Scanlon, who jumped aside, keeping his gun well out of reach. Beecher continued on to the door, where he halted, turned and smiled with all the composure of a society matron at the conclusion of a slumming tour. "I'll see you later." he said.

"Not if we see you first," said Scanlon.

"Thats what I mean. You may not be seeing when I see you again."

"You're outlining your welcome," said Crosbi. "We might change that."

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The door closed softly behind Judd Beecher.

Ace picked up the amber colored discs. They were cold and hard. He walked to the disposal chute and dropped them inside. A few minutes before, he had thought them to be stacks of currency, worth a million credits apiece.

II

AFTER SCANLON left, Ace Crosbi sat for a few minutes thinking of the things that had transpired. What could make Judd Beecher want the *Casa Conon* so badly that he was willing to pay twice what it was worth? The three story, windowless building, with all of its modern air purifying and water conservation equipment wasn't worth that. It was true that Ace cleared nearly a quarter of a million a year, and he grossed maybe two million; but his overhead was terrific. Twenty-eight employees, all drew top wages; and the atomic pile in the basement that supplied heat as well as power cost a small fortune to maintain.

All Crosbi knew was that certain things were taking place on the moon and he didn't like them a bit. He searched his mind for a "hunch," but even extra sensory perception failed to help him. His mind felt confused, as if too many thoughts were rushing through it, thoughts he didn't understand and couldn't comprehend.

It came back to him now that Esp sometimes made the laws of chance obsolete. Years ago, his father had abolished card games. Lots of patrons had won plenty at blackjack and poker in the early days when his father had opened *Casa Conon*. The reason wasn't marked cards or skill, but because the gamblers sensed what was in the other fellow's hand.

In college on earth, Crosbi had spent a great deal of time in psychological research, trying to determine what Esp was and how it worked. But the curious thing was that, on Earth, Esp wasn't consistent. A few people showed ability to read minds, but most people didn't. Many scientists scoffed at Esp; others were convinced that it lay, partly at least, beyond man's powers. But on the moon, no one doubted—no one with sense anyhow. Dag Scanlon doubted almost everything, except his paycheck, his whisky, and his girl-friend in whom Crosbi would not have place quite so much faith. But Dag had no sense.

And so Crosbi had to trust his own observations in the matter of extra-sensory perception. He discarded clairvoyance, prophecy, and until recently he had doubted psycho-kinesis. Telepathy, according to Crosbi's defini-

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tion, was somewhat different from the definition given by terrestrial scientists. Ace knew that it was next to impossible for two people to carry on a conversation by telepathy. Two people might exchange thoughts, but it would be a single contact of minds. Even then, it might be possible for one mind to grasp what was on the other, while the second mind missed. Telepathy was like a fleeting glimpse, a muffled sound or an elusive odor. It was present at one instant, then gone; a mind had to grasp the thought instantly and retain it, or it was lost.

And now vague thoughts, which Ace Crosbi was unable to grasp, were flowing through his mind.

ANOTHER point about telepathy seemed to bother him: It was the law of the square of the distance. Telepathy was not spiritual; it was as material as electricity, or light. Thoughts did not transmit themselves on nothing; there had to be some kind of energy. The human brain, apparently, was the only instrument delicate enough to detect this energy. But if there was an energy which radiated thought, why was a feeling transmitted for long distances with the same intensity as a feeling from close by?

There had been one graying psychologist on earth who had supplied the answer to that one. He even had a name for the energy: Telepathic Energy Quanta, or Teq.

Of course, the whole thing was theory, but to Crosbi, it sounded more logical than anything he could supply from his own mind.

Teq was like light—it almost had to be. All forms of energy have certain common properties or sources of origin. Just because Teq couldn't be pinned down, was no reason for believing it to be different.

Light became less intense the farther away one went from the source, yet each light quantum fell on the eye with the same intensity that it started. The reason light diminished was because the number of quanta was spread out. Could thought be packed away in something as small as a quantum?

Ace knew that a lot of thought could be put in a small space. There was the phenomena of dreams. A dream that seems hours in duration, actually lasts only a brief instant. Certain drugs can expand time to a seemingly-infinite extent, and thought—albeit distorted thought—runs rampant. And Crosbi's sensations of telepathy—the hunches, to use Scanlon's term—were instantaneous. Thought had no lateral measurement, it was

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small and spaceless, like a quantum.

BUT WHY was telepathy real on the moon and only a theory on earth? What was it the moon had that Earth didn't have? More than likely, it was something the moon *didn't* have that made telepathy possible. Crosbi couldn't believe that atmosphere, gravity, water or certain minerals had anything to do with telepathy, or the lack of it. Even the amber crystals that had induced hypnosis probably had no basic connection with Teq. Perhaps they modfied it, but they certainly did not produce it. Many elements and minerals had certain properties of this sort. Selenium reacted to light, Germanium to electricity, galena to radio, some elements conducted heat better than others. The brownish crystals must be sensitive to Teq.

Ostensibly, that was why Judd Beecher wanted *Casa Conon.* In any line of business, thought-reading could be valuable, but in gambling it would be devestating. The laws of chance allowed an honest gambler only two ways to win: percentage and skill in betting. Betting skill is based almost entirely on manipulating percentage by knowing what's on the other fellow's mind. As things stood now, a better had just as much chance of reading a gambler's mind as a gambler had in reading the mind of the better. But something like those crystals would give a man the upper hand. Or would it?

Ace Crosbi had to find out.

He left his office, locking it behind him. He descended to the bar because he knew that it was time for Diane Wallace to be on relief from her operation of Crap Table No. 3.

SHE WAS seated on a bar stool, sipping an Alpetragius cocktail. Diane, beautiful as an earth-lit night, was an unusual housegirl. She had been born on the moon and educated on the earth, as had Crosbi, and had returned with high hopes of raising the intellectual standard of the earth's satellite. But she had found that the moon was filled with miners and tourists, neither of whom seemed much interested in broadening their philosophical horizons. And so she became a gambler.

Without looking at him, she said, "Hello, Ace. What's on your mind."

Crosbi smiled. People born on the moon, and thus exposed to Teq throughout their lives, were much more sensitive to telepathic impulses. She had sensed that he had been looking for her.

From his pocket, Ace took a pair of dice that Mike Sublette had given him. "These."

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"Naturally," said Diane. "Those are your business."

Hector, the senior bartender, stepped up and Ace ordered a whisky Imbrium, the favorite drink of prospectors in the Spitzenberg mountains, north of Beer crater.

Crosbi shook the dice and rolled them on the bar. They came up ace-ace.

"Craps," said Diane. "This must be your night."

"Funny thing," he said. "I was thinking of my troubles. Of myself, Ace. The dice came up Ace-Ace, the way they always do when I think of myself."

"Psycho-kinesis yet."

Crosbi did not laugh. He held the dice between his sensitive fingers, turning them over out of habit. His fingers could distinguish flats from true dice this way. But he already knew these were true.

"These are made of a special crystal. Supposing you think of a point, but think of it as four-four, six-deuce, three-deuce. Don't think of it of eight or six or five or what-have-you."

Diane nodded. "Got it."

ACE SHOOK and rolled. They came up four-deuce.

"Lucky," said Diane. "Do it again and I'll buy your drink."

Crosbi shook his head. "I wouldn't take advantage of you, girl; these dice always do right. Now we'll try and each of us think of a point. We'll see who has the strongest mind."

Diane nodded. "Ready."

Ace rattled and rolled. The dice came up six-five. "I've got the strongest mind," said Diane.

"Funny, but that's what I picked. Eleven."

"Coincidence. Try it again."

They rolled again. Once more, both of them picked the same point, this time, two-two. "It must be telepathy," said Diane.

"Could it be hypnotism?"

She looked at him. "You mean the dice hypnotised us so we guessed what they intended to do? Don't be silly. That would presuppose consciousness and intelligence on the part of an inanimate object; that's animism."

"We rule out animism?"

"Intelligence anyhow," said Diane. "Sometimes it's hard to tell where life starts, and death ends, or the other way around. But I don't see any viruses doing tricks with non-Euclidean geometry. Multiplication maybe, but nothing that requires thought."

"Okay," said Crosbi. "But how about us being hypnotised—auto—hypnosis—and suggesting the point to each other by telepathy?"

DIANE PICKED up the dice and looked at them

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closely. "There is a certain hypnotic quality in dice. Auto-hypnotism is possible, of course, but difficult. Hypnotism is easiest when you pull a little trickery. You have to have a hypnotist, or an operator, to get the best results. And because trickery helps, the professionals, or stage hypnotists, can sometimes get more astonishing results than the scientists. The stage hypnotists are practicing psychologists; the scientists know the theory, but not the art. Actually, though, if there is any hypnotising going on here, it might be, we did it to each other by telepathy."

"That opens up a lot of lines for speculation."

"Too many," said Diane."

Dag Scanlon entered the bar, squatted on a stool and ordered a shot of whisky. It was 10 o'clock, time for his hourly medicine. Ace shook the dice. "Think of a point, Dag." Ace winked at Diane. "Let's see if I can roll it without your telling me."

"Okay, boss."

Crosbi rolled the dice. They came up five-five.

"Chee," said Dag. "I'm hot tonight."

Crosbi glanced at Diane, who nodded; three of them had picked the same point.

"Take a good look at those dice." Crosbi handed the dice to Scanlon. "Ever see anything like them before."

Dag picked up the dice, and his eyelids seemed heavy as he looked at them. "Sure. They're made of the same stuff that that guy had in his shirt stud."

Crosbi nodded. "Those dice will roll any point you want them to. Try it and see." He sipped his drink and watched Dag.

Scanlon shook the dice. "Seven," he said. The dice came up six-ace.

"They'll do better if you say six-ace, five-deuce, and so on," Diane told him.

"Ten, the hard way," said Scanlon. The dice came up five-five.

"Let's all pick a different point," Crosbi said, "and say it out loud before Dag rolls."

"Five-four," said Diane.

"Deuce-deuce," said Scanlon.

"Ace-Ace," said Crosbi.

Dag rolled, and the dice came up blank.

"Hey, these cubes ain't on the level!"

"Yes, I think we caught them cheating." Crosbi looked at Diane. "How does the hypnotism theory hold up now?"

"Worse than ever."

Another figure entered the bar and moved toward Crosbi, smiling. Ace rose and left his unfinished drink on the bar. "You're the man I want to see!" he exploded.

Mike Lorraine's brown face cracked along its creases. "I sorta figured you would, son. I sorta figured."

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ACE CROSBI and Mike Lorraine sat in the lounge adjoining the bar. Lorraine was puffing on a black cigar made of tar-free synthetic tobacco. He looked like an owl, now that he had put on glasses. His hair, which seemed all cowlicks, stood out like ruffled feathers and his nose looked like a beak.

"I call it Staghorn crystal because I found the stuff in the Stag's Horn Mountains," he said. "I only know two things about the stuff. First, the crystals do what you want 'em to do."

"Not always," said Crosbi. "Sometimes they make me do what I don't want to do—believe in things that aren't there, for example."

"That's the second thing about 'em. They're a kind of a drug. Not habit-formin', but you can get a whale of a jag off a fistful of Staghorn."

"You mean like marijuana or something?"

"Or something," said Lorraine. "When I first found the lode, I went sound asleep. I woke up runnin' around outside the cave without my pressure suit on."

"Good heavens! You can't expect me to believe that. You'd die!"

"Nope," said Mike. "I ain't dead; leastwise, I don't think I am."

"You shouldn't have lasted five minutes. Even a minute!"

"I must've been wi[illegible] for at least fifteen."

ACE STUDIED the crystals. He'd heard stories before of men out on the moon who had torn their pressure suits, and who had lived. Since all the air of all lunar dwellings is tempered with helium instead of nitrogen, the difficulty arising from bends was eliminated. However, a man's blood pressure would cause erupted veins and arteries. Apoplexy, blindness, and other things should result from unprotected exposure to the vacuum on the moon's surface. Yet, there were stories of men who had survived. Crosbi had always written them off as legends.

"It wasn't long before I learned how to handle the crystals," Lorraine went on. "Keep away from it. A little bit won't hurt you, unless it's polished up. Then it sorta puts you to sleep. But if you carry a lot of it, you gotta shield it, like uranium. I happened to have an ore bag with me, so I got a couple of crystals and brought 'em back. I made them dice out of some of it."

"What else did you ma[illegible]?"

Lorraine reached under his coat and pulled out a knife with an amber handle made of Staghorn crystal. "It was sorta decorative," he said, half apologetically.

"Is that all?"

Mike nodded.

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"You didn't make any flat discs, or a shirt stud, or anything?"

"I told you, I didn't bring back much of the stuff. I've got to be careful. I'm too old to go on dream jags."

"Why did you bring these dice to me?"

Mike laughed. "I made 'em just for the helluvit. Then I found out I couldn't miss with 'em, and I thought I'd give you somethin' to worry about."

ACE CROSBI held the dice out to Lorraine. "I won't have the things in my place."

"Why not? They're good for a laugh."

"They're not legit."

Mike laughed again, very loudly. "Since when has a cold-hearted gambler got scruples? You take more off the tourists than the lunar peep shows and give 'em less in return."

"I give entertainment, thrills. Sometimes a customer even wins."

"Tain't often."

"No," Crosbi agreed. "Not often. Anyone who gambles with a professional is bound to lose eventually. That's not because I'm crooked, or overly skilled; the percentages take care of me.

Lorraine rose to his feet. "I don't want 'em back. Folks tell me that besides bein' a gambler, you're smart; you want to know why things do like they do. Well, here's your chance, son. There's nobody else on the moon that gives a hang about science, so you figure out what's in Staghorn crystals: The moon could do with a man who's got brains."

Before Crosbi could stop him, Mike Lorraine had shuffled off toward the exit locks.

III

ACE SIGNALED Dag Scanlon as he passed the bar. Dag, who had been chatting with Myrna, rose and followed Ace to the exit locks.

"I'm going out," Crosbi said. "I want you to come along."

Scanlon nodded. The boss needed protection after that scene with Judd Beecher. Dag realized that the young fellow who had been dressed so fancy hadn't been just mouthing off when he talked about funerals.

The two men passed through the locks and out on the lunar street. It was well lighted by a full earth which hung almost directly southward about forty-five degrees between horizon and zenith. There were only a few pale street lamps and the street was empty of traffic.

Most people used the subterranean tunnels and the monorail cars in traveling from place to place in Crater

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Conon. Although only two meteors had ever hit the protecting dome with enough force to crack it, there was always a possibility of being caught outside a building when the air escaped. All buildings and all caves in the crater were sealed, and maintained with independent air supplies, but outside, under the dome there was only a thin atmosphere.

But Mike Lorraine, who claimed he had lived fifteen minutes on the moon without a pressure suit, apparently had no fear of a stray meteor. He was walking the streets.

It wasn't hard to locate Mike by telepathy; the old miner sprayed his thoughts all over the crater. He was in extra good humor, possibly because he thought he had played an immense joke on Ace Crosbi. Thus Ace trailed Mike, and soon caught up with him; but by this time, Lorraine had reached the north crater entrance.

The locks that opened up on a tunnel through the crater walls, were in a huge, oblong building that housed scores of pressure cars. Some of these were privately owned, others were rented to tourists, or prospectors who sought to travel over the surface of the moon.

These pressure cars, looking like a glass bullet on wheels, were powered by fission-generated electricity, and could move at terrific speeds over the lunar flatlands, and could climb at impossible angles over the lunar hills.

There was no need for road-building on the moon; even crater walls were remarkably smooth. There had never been erosion, and the only dangers were cracks and rough ridges, both the result of shrinkage when the moon had cooled some two billion years ago. A layer of meteoric dust made traction good on the glassy surface of basaltic areas, but this dust was not thick enough to impede progress nor lessen the impression that the entire surface of the moon was paved.

WHEN Ace Crosbi and Dag Scanlon reached the entrance of the building, Lorraine had already entered the locks. They could not follow him till the inside doors had opened and closed; by the time Crosbi reached the interior, Mike had disappeared.

A red light over the exit locks that led to the tunnel, told Ace where Lorraine had gone. He was in his car, headed for the lunar surface.

The attendant was sleeping, but Crosbi roused him long enough to rent a pressure car and presently, with Scanlon riding beside him, they were moving through the tunnel toward the cold silence of lunar night.

The locks opened up in Aratus pass, which got its name from Crater Aratus at

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its northwestern terminus. It was not a canyon by terrestrial standards, for it had not been created by erosion. It was simply a cleft between the Haemus range of mountains and the Lunar Apennines, which crossed them like a T.

Overhead, the earth shed a greenish light over the weird moonscape; headlights were unnecessary, and Crosbi did not turn his on. Ahead, they caught the gleam of Mike's lights, and that was enough. Lorraine might have sensed that Crosbi was following him earlier; but now Ace could pick up only bits of Mike's thoughts, and he doubted if Lorraine could receive his.

A SUDDEN thought struck Ace. Why wasn't he able to get those gleeful bits of Teq from Mike Lorraine? Was something intercepting? And why hadn't Mike shown concern at being followed? Could it be that Crosbi had received and Mike had not? If so, why hadn't Lorraine been as sensitive as Crosbi? Mike had been born on the moon; he should be as keen as Crosbi. The explanation might lie in Scanlon. Could Dag have gobbled up Ace's Teq radiation? It might be, under special circumstances, that a thought could be intercepted.

The more Ace Crosbi thought, the more he became certain this was the case. Such an explanation would go far toward revealing why there was a dearth of telepathy on the earth. Earth had life in abundance. If Teq were some sort of life energy, then there would be a myriad of living things, from viruses to whales that would gobble it up. Small chance for any wandering quantum of Teq to get very far. Most thoughts would be utterly incomprehensible to the creature that intercepted them. On the moon, where life was scant, a thought had a chance to drift a long distance before it was intercepted. The entire population of the moon, excluding tourists, probably was less than a hundred thousand. There was scarcely any livestock, but there were some plants, and probably a few microbes. More living individuals could be found in a square mile of good rich land on Earth than existed on the entire lunar surface!

And the speculation led Ace Crosbi to suspect why he wasn't receiving much from Mike Lorraine. Mike wasn't alone.

Suddenly, the lights ahead swerved directly north. On the left was Crater Aratus, and about twenty miles directly north was the huge bulk of Mt. Hadley, a crater somewhat larger than Conon. Beyond Mt. Hadley lay the smooth floor of Mare Serenitatis, a lake of solid glass which lay between Aratus Pass and the outlying ranges of the Lunar Alps.

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ACE TOUCHED the throttle as Mike Lorraine increased his speed. The cars were traveling close to 180 miles an hour now, but this was not fast on the moon, which had no hazards for the motorists, in fact not even roads. The only danger was collision, which was practically impossible on the empty surface of the plains.

Suddenly the headlights ahead swerved again and slowed. The car was pulling into the shadows of Mt. Hadley. Crosbi cut his speed and stopped. Quickly Ace squirmed into one of the two pressure suits that were stowed under the car seat. He closed the helmet, tuned up the radio with low power and spoke to Scanlon, who was trying to pull a pressure suit over his bulky frame.

"I'm going ahead on foot," said Ace. "Something's wrong up there. You stay here; I'll signal if I need you."

Ace climbed out of the car while Scanlon closed his helmet.

He stood on the lunar plain, his eyes focused on the headlights of the car parked nearly a mile ahead.

Then a surge of Teq swept his brain; it was a mental cry of fear, anguish and pain. Ace Crosbi jumped forward.

No earthman can run on the moon, for it takes more skill than ski-jumping. But Crosbi, who had lived his life on the satellite, was no longer a man of Earth, and he had mastered the technique. The secret was balance; by keeping balance, he was able to land on his feet after strides of eighty to a hundred feet across the ground.

Crosbi traveled the mile in less than a minute and arrived scarcely panting.

The car was there and its door was open. In the front seat, at the wheel sat Mike Lorraine, without a space suit. Ace climbed into the car, slammed the door. As he turned on the air pressure he knew it was no use; Lorraine was as dead as the other side of the moon.

But it was not the lack of air that had killed Lorraine, who had boasted of living fifteen minutes in the vacuum of the moon's surface without loosing consciousness. Mike's knife, the one with the handle of Staghorn Crystal, protruded from his side.

ACE STARED into the dark shadows of Mt. Hadley. Somewhere out there was the murderer. He had fled at Crosbi's approach, both because he did not know whether Ace was armed and because he was unarmed himself. The fact that he had used Lorraine's own knife for murder was evidence that he had no other weapon.

A strong wave of Teq swept Crosbi's mind, a feeling of contempt, a feeling of hatred, and a feeling that Ace did

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not understand. He could identify the quantum. He had felt it once before that day; it came from a stranger named Judd Beecher.

Ace turned up the power in his helmet radio. "Go back to Crater Conon and get the cops, Dag. Mike's been murdered."

He heard Scanlon's startled gasp and then a flood of questions. Ace cut him off, told him to hurry, then sat down beside Mike's car to wait.

ON THE MOON there is little movement in the skies that allow a man to measure time. Even when the sun is in the sky, the period between sunrise and sunset is so long that the sun's slow crawl is almost imperceptible. At night, Earth and the stars hang in the same position, seemingly, for hours on end; the movement as the stars rise and set can hardly be detected in the space of several hours.

Ace Crosbi sat by the pressure car, his eyes trying to pierce the shadow cast by the lunar peak. Someone was there; he could tell by fleeting flashes of Teq. The man was Judd Beecher, even though the telepathic signal could never reveal a name. Beecher was watching, waiting; for he wanted something.

What? What did he want?

Crosbi felt sure there had been no battle here. The attack on Mike Lorraine had been a surprise move; and whatever it was that Beecher wanted, he had not been able to obtain, because Crosbi had appeared on the scene.

Ace stood up, looked into the car. He shivered as he saw the dried-up face of the little old miner in the driver's seat. Mike had been in high spirits as he walked through Conon on his way to a rendezvous with death.

Crosbi moved around the car, searching it. As he did so, he felt confused, as if he had forgotten something, something he had to do and had not done.

Crosbi turned his head. Telepathy is seldom direction in the thought, but somehow Ace turned in the right direction. Emerging from the darkness was the figure of a man, a man without a pressure suit!

Ace shouted, but his voice could not carry in the vacuum. The man had no radio unit and could not hear. He sprang and dashed away into the darkness.

The distance was too far for Crosbi to recognize the man. It might well be Judd Beecher. The fellow ran like a moon-man, which Beecher certainly was; but no one could live long in the mountains of the moon without a pressure suit. Even Mike Lorraine, who boasted of living fifteen minutes without one, could never survive. It would take more than fifteen min-

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utes, even in a fast car, to reach the locks of Conon Crater. On foot it would take an hour!

Ace swung open the door of the car, and found what he was after sewed in the lining of Lorraine's coat. A small, fibre bag, lined with lead foil. In it were seven rough shaped stones, unpolished bits of Staghorn Crystal.

THERE WASN'T a great deal of law in Crater Conon. Captain Opewell investigated and said Mike Lorraine was dead, probably murdered by parties unknown. Ace Crosbi couldn't say who he'd seen running around on the moon without a pressure suit, and Opewell didn't believe it anyhow. They found a few tracks in meteor dust, but these might have been there for centuries. Anyhow, you couldn't tell whether the wearer had a pressure suit or not from the tracks.

So the little old miner was buried in the Haemus Mountains and Crater Conon went back to its enjoyment of life.

Lorraine's sole possessions, which included his mining tools, about fifty credits in cash and seven Staghorn Crystals were auctioned off to pay his outstanding debts and the incident would have been closed, except that Opewell had a hunch.

A few years ago, when Crosbi's father ran the *Casa Conon,* Captain Opewell had found somebody smuggling synthetic dope into the crater from the Spitzbergen Mountains. Therefore, Opewell considered himself an expert on dope.

It was only natural that he should try the dope angle for size in the Lorraine killing, and he came up with a solution that was more weird than the killing itself.

He told Crosbi about it. According to the police captain, the Staghorn crystals were habit-forming. Crosbi had admitted that one almost put him to sleep, and Ace had illustrated with the dice that they had some sort of hypnotic power that made blank sides look like spots on dice. A fellow who looked at Staghorn crystals often enough, couldn't do without them.

"This mysterious Judd Beecher is a fiend," Opewell said. "He killed Lorraine for the crystals Mike had on him."

"He didn't get the crystals."

"That's because you scared him away. And those crystals made you think you saw somebody running around without a pressure suit."

ACE TURNED the idea over in his mind. He knew what he'd seen. He might have been mistaken, of course, and something might have befuddled him, just as Lorraine's dice had befuddled him. But Crosbi remembered that Mike himself had claimed

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to have been running around on the moon without a pressure suit.

Ace Crosbi wondered if it were possible. Environment did strange things to plants; why not to men? Certain plants transplanted into different soil become different. There are even fish that are poisonous in some waters and quite edible in other waters. The moon had been colonized for some three hundred years. Some people living on the moon had never been on Earth. A few had visited Earth briefly, and even fewer, like Diane Boyer and Ace Crosbi, had been educated there. It was a fact that moon men seldom remained on the earth. With all the disadvantages of living on the moon, the native moon-men liked it better than gravity-bound Earth.

Crosbi wondered if men on the moon had, after 300 years of colonization, somehow prepared themselves to live on the airless surface. But how could this be done by men without exposing themselves to these conditions? Surely there was no telepathy from the moon itself to the pituitary gland, telling how the body should be conditioned for life in an airless world!

On the other hand, there was a reason why men on the moon consumed less water than the average earth-bred man. On the moon, water is precious and it is purified and repurified over and over again. Men used it sparingly and made every drop count. And possibly moon-men could get along on less air, because the streets had low-pressure atmosphere that often caused earthmen to halt to catch their breath. But the air in the streets of Crater Conon was no more rarified than that of the Andes and people lived there.

And this certainly was not living without any air at all.

Slowly Ace Crosbi came to a decision. He would attempt to survive without a pressure suit, outside the protecting dome of the crater.

HE CHOSE the early morning, soon after the sun rose for its fourteen-day voyage across the sky. With a pressure car, and Dag Scanlon, he went deep into Aratus Pass. Dag wore a pressure suit and he carried an extra helmet for Crosbi. Ace wore the suit and no helmet; he was to be allowed to lapse into unconsciousness and Dag was to revive him. There was special equipment for expanding Crosbi's lungs, in case they collapsed in the vacuum, which they probably would.

If something happened to Ace's heart, nothing much could be done.

And so Crosbi stepped out of his pressure car and looked around. He had seen the lunar landscape, and there was nothing new to see, but he was

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surprised that his vision was so clear. He had half expected to be blinded by the bursting of blood vessels in his eyes. But he could see clearly. He could taste nothing, because there was no air; his sense of smell and hearing also were useless, but he could see.

He dropped to one knee and ran his bare hand over the rock. It was intensely cold, and his hand was half-numbed.

But his senses were alert; he felt no discomfort, save from a frantic idea that he must breathe or die. But he wasn't breathing. The air had gushed out of his lungs the moment he stepped from the car.

Ace turned, looked at Scanlon. Dag was seated in the car like a man of stone. He was staring straight ahead, not watching Crosbi. His eyes were fixed on a bright, shiny piece of stone that flashed the early sun's light in his eyes.

Ace still could see. That stone was Staghorn Crystal, and it was not lying on the ground. It was held in the hand of a man who strode toward him—a man as naked, for all vacuum purposes, as Ace himself.

The man was Judd Beecher.

AN OMINOUS feeling of impending doom swept over Crosbi. It was not Ace's own feeling, but a telepathic urge hurled at him by Beecher.

Ace opened his mouth to call to Scanlon. But Dag sat motionless, seemingly hypnotised by the brightness of Beecher's bit of crystal. Ace's mouth worked silently, for he could not make a sound in the vacuum.

Crosbi turned, and Judd Beecher leaped to intercept Ace's plunge toward the car. It was Beecher's anticipation that Ace would seek safety in a place where air could be found, that saved Crosbi that moment.

Seeing his way to safety blocked, Ace swung his fist. It struck Judd Beecher on the cheek, driving him back against the side of the pressure car. The crystal fell from his hand.

Ace stepped forward, gave it a kick and sent the bright stone dancing over the glassy rock of the canyon floor.

Beecher snarled, glancing at Scanlon, still motionless in the car. Slowly Dag's head turned. With seeming effort he started to lift his hand.

Beecher bent low, reached toward a pitted meteor fragment that lay nearby. He seized this, lifted it in his hand and hurled it at Crosbi.

His aim was bad, and Ace ducked to one side. Wagging his mouth with silent curses, Beecher turned and fled back among the spires and yawning holes that decorated the walls of the canyon.

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IN HIS CAR Scanlon had managed to pull his pistol from his holster. He emerged slowly from the car, and then fitted the helmet over Crosbi's head.

To his surprise, Ace found that he was not suffering although he had been outside the pressure car, with no protecting equipment for almost ten minutes.

His hands and cheeks were numb with cold, but these were the only effects. He filled his collapsed lungs easily, without help from Dag.

But he had learned something else, too. Scanlon sat in the pressure car holding something in his gloved hand —an unpolished crystal. "Where'd you get that?" Ace demanded.

"I bought it at auction," said Scanlon. "It belonged to Mike Lorraine."

Ace Crosbi grabbed the rock and dropped it into the refuse chamber of the car. A moment later it was dropped out onto the lunar surface.

"The day that Beecher put me to sleep, I had those dice in my pocket," Ace said. "Today you had a bit of crystal. Somehow, Beecher knew there was a crystal in the car and he attacked, hoping that I had it. He figured that as long as it was one against one, he'd have the advantage, because he felt superior. But we surprised him. He wasn't!"

"I don't get it, boss," said Scanlon. "I thought you'd drown without air."

Ace Crosbi had a theory. He wasn't sure everything fitted, but they seemed to. He knew what the crystals did; he knew why men could live without air, and why telepathy was so keen on the moon. He also sensed who Judd Beecher was, and where he came from.

He would have to go to the Seven Craters region to get all the answers.

IV

THEY LEFT the car at the entrance and went back to the casino. Table 3 was busy, but Myrna, not Diane, was running the game.

Ace Crosbi went directly to his office. He opened the desk drawer to search for the shirt stud he had taken from Beecher that first day he met the young man.

It was gone. He called in Scanlon. Dag hadn't seen it. Neither had Zack Wood. Nor any of the men who had been in his office recently.

"Find out who's got it," Ace said. "It's more dangerous than anything on the moon."

Dag started his search and Crosbi sank into the chair behind his desk. Esp didn't answer the problem. Nor did PK, hypnotism, clairvoyance and prophecy. It was something that was similar to, yet different from, all of these. It

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would prove the existence of Teq.

And suddenly Crosbi had an answer that fitted. Teq, thought energy quanta, did not originate in the human mind. It was a radiant energy of space, like light, like cosmic radiation, like the radio waves that stars transmit. It continually flowed, and was absorbed by living creatures throughout the universe.

When a being absorbed Teq, he released some. This energy, modulated and conditioned, gave an impression of the sender's mind. It wasn't a matter of transmitting one's thoughts—it was releasing old energy that had been replaced by new.

No wonder Earth was conservative, and held onto its old ideas. New Teq was precious there. There was competition for every quantum. No wonder there were living fossils, animals which went on following the same pattern of life for millions of years. They lacked Teq, the energy that made them change. Teq bred mutations.

Here on the moon, in the space of 300 years, man had acquired an ability to live for a brief space of time without air. How long, Ace Crosbi did not know. He doubted that man could equal the endurance of a whale, which lives under water for as much as two hours or more. But man was becoming a hybrid animal, one that could live in and out of an atmosphere. Children of pioneer moon men were mutants of a sort.

THE DOOR swung open. "I know who got that thing," Scanlon announced.

"Where is it?"

"Ain't here. Diane picked it up when she was going through your desk for some calipers to check dice."

"Where's Diane? We've got to find her! As long as Judd Beecher's around, she's in danger!"

"Diane has gone. Nobody knows where she went—she's supposed to be at No. 3 table, but Myrna, who knew about Diane finding that crystal, said she walked out like she was in a dream."

Crosbi stood motionless. A wave of feeling passed over him. Somewhere Beecher was laughing at him. He had Diane, and was carrying her away. One thing Beecher did not know, or even suspect, was that Ace Crosbi knew where he was going.

"Get a gun for me," Crosbi said, "and a case of concentrated food. We're going on a trip."

THERE'S no blue haze on the mountains of the moon. They stand out clear, shining with all the colors of the rainbow, without the haze that comes from air and all air contains.

Crosbi's pressure car speeded southward across Sinus

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Medii. To the west the bulky Crater Triesnecker, fully fifty miles in diameter, stood like an ugly sore on the surface of the moon. Ahead lay the smaller Bruce Crater, which was even smaller than Crater Conon. Not far beyond but just over the horizon lay Ptolemaeus, the first of the Seven Craters.

"Years ago," said Ace, "long before my great grandfather's time, there was an attempt to settle the Southern Hemisphere. Craer Conon had been such a success in the north that a group decided to build a another city south of the equator. They had a particular crater in mind, one called Birt, which was really two craters in one. In some ways it was a better location than Conon, except that it was less accessible to Nikes from the earth. About forty families set out, and that was the last anyone ever heard of them."

"You think, their descendants are alive?"

Crosbi nodded. He knew they were, at least one of their descendants. But they hadn't settled in Birt. People had visited Birt later and found no trace of life. But even on the moon, a caravan of more than 150 people can't vanish into thin vacuum. The explanation was that something happened that made them go somewhere else.

Ptolemaeus came into view, looking remarkably close even though it was nearly a hundred miles away. Crosbi swerved to the left to go around it, keeping his car moving at an even three hundred miles an hour.

Directly beyond Ptolemaeus lay Alphons, and then Arzachel. Flanking the common wall of the two craters were two small craters, only one of which was named, and Ace had forgotten that. And then the country appeared to be a dense mass of broken mountain ridges, the straight wall, unnamed gullies, vast fissures and ugly rock domes. It looked all the world like the surface of a bubbling witches' brew, frozen at its most violent stage.

ACE CROSBI swung the car far to the east and approached Crater Thebit, the smallest of the Seven Craters, from the northeast between the Straight Wall and the Northern End of the Stag's Horn Mountains. And then, at the base of Thebit, he brought the car to a halt.

"Is this it?" Scanlon asked, looking at the high walls of the fifty-mile crater.

Ace shook his head. "No, this is the path taken by the Lost Settlers. You see, they got into trouble because they didn't realize lunar maps are different from maps of the earth."

"Huh?" Day looked blank.

"On an Earth map, the top is the north; the right is east; the left is west, and the bot-

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tom is south. On lunar maps, east and west are in their right places, only if you put South at the top and north at the bottom."

"I don't get it," said Scanlon. "How can north and south get twisted around?"

"It isn't north and south that are twisted. It would be okay then just to turn a moon map upside down. But east and west are also transposed. You see, the first maps of the moon were made centuries before man ever set foot on the satellite. The maps naturally were drawn for use in study with a telescope, therefore the image was reversed. When men came to the moon, the new areas were charted in the same way maps were drawn on the Earth, but the old maps remained a telescopic image."

When the Lost Settlers started out on their trip they were going into a new territory, which was unexplored. Their charts were the old lunar maps made by telescope. They could see that north and south were transposed, but they did not realize that east and west also were in the wrong places.

In order to reach Birt, a traveler must circle eastward around Stag's Horn Mountains. But the Lost Settlers went west, because they didn't know how to read a lunar map.

"Instead of winding up at Birt, they went through the pass between Thebit and Arzachel," Ace said. "There are four or five craters beyond, all about the the same size as Crater Conon. Some probably are double craters. I know of at least two double craters farther south."

ACE WENT on with his story. The Lost Settlers were forgotten. And then one day, generations later, an old prospector named Mike Lorraine stumbled onto something in the Stag's Horn Mountains. Mike knew it wasn't a strike, for he never filed a claim. He found something there that had been of value to the Lost Colony of the moon. He brought it to Crater Conon. He didn't know exactly what it was, except that it possessed a strange hypnotic power over man that varied in intensity, almost as if it directed itself.

How was Lorraine to know that he had discovered a Teq lodestone? That this stuff drew Teq from space and exuded it just like living creatures, although the crystals themselves were not alive. Minerals do that: Germanium does the work of a complicated vacuum tube. Most of man's inventions are complicated ways of doing things that nature does almost without exertion.

The Stag's Horn mountains are a long distance from the Lost Colony. Possibly Lorraine's theft, for it was a kind

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of a theft, was not discovered until after Mike had returned to Conon. But the Lost Colonists knew where to look. Crater Conon had forgotten about the settlers, but the settlers had not forgotten about Conon.

Generations of proximity to a focal point of Teq had changed them. They were aware that they had qualities man did not have before he came to the moon. Already, they knew they could exist for comparatively long periods in the vacuum of the lunar surface. They visualized themselves as superior beings. One of their number would be enough to track down the stolen crystals.

And so Beecher set out for Conon. Arriving there he set out to locate Lorraine, and instead he was captivated by the civilized life of the tourist center. He tried to buy *Casa Conon*, so that he could live on in the crater, after accomplishing his mission. Having no money, he attempted to get it by using the crystals. But Day Scanlon had frustrated him, and this was a blow to Beecher's ego. He had two missions to accomplish now, one of them a score of his own.

MIKE PROBABLY never knew he was a hunted man. Possibly after he left Casa Conon, he was hypnotised by Beecher. He led Judd, as well as Crosbi and Scanlon, to his car, stored at the crater locks, where he kept a quanity of the crystals in a lead lined bag. Beecher killed Mike; then he waited to kill Crosbi. Again he was frustrated, but in the meantime he discovered that Diane meant something to Crosbi. Ace had stored this secret away in his subconscious, but Judd Beecher could sense by telepathy what Crosbi would not admit to himself.

Judd made his plans carefully, and when Diane stumbled onto the hypnotising bit of crystal in Crosbi's drawer, he could direct her movements. It is possible that he forced Diane to drop a clue so that Crosbi would know where to look for her.

And now Crosbi was in a trap. Ace knew the trap was set and baited with Diane, but he had one advantage that Judd Beecher did not realize.

Beecher believed that only the Lost Colonists had been able to absorb the Teq, to adopt themselves to the moon. He did not know that Teq is *environment*. The life force direct living organisms toward a goal of survival. In Crater Conon moon men had evolved, just as the Lost Colonists had evolved, into organisms well on the road to survive even on an airless satellite.

Crater Conon people did not realize it. Mike Lorraine had discovered by accident

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he could live without a pressure suit. Crosbi had discovered it by experiment. Others could do it, but did not know it.

Crosbi knew that, in most physical respects, he was Beecher's equal. If Ace could guard against surprise, he would have an even chance to met Judd Beecher on even terms, even though he was walking into a trap. And as a means of guarding against surprise, Ace had Dag Scanlon.

Dag was not a moon man, but he could guard Crosbi from surprise attack.

ACE SLIPPED into his pressure suit and crawled out of the car, and Dag, also protected against the lunar vacuum by a pressure suit, crawled after him.

Already the sun was warming the moon's surface to a temperature hot enough to boil water at the earth's sea level, but heat resistant shoes protected their feet.

Ace Crosbi did not head toward the craters that might be the home of the Lost Settlers. Something drew him eastward—perhaps the same force that had drawn the Lost Settlers to the spot, and the force that had lured Mike Lorraine to make the discovery that led to his doom. Crosbi approached the Y-shapes spread that looks so much like a stags horn through a telescope. It was this formation that gave the mountain range its name when astronomers first started mapping the moon.

Perhaps the mistake of the maps had been rectified, perhaps the Lost Settlers were encamped in one of the Seven Craters. There was a fairly large settlement in Copernicus, where tunnels and caverns had been sealed off to hold air. Similar work could have been done in any of the Seven Craters that spanned nearly half of the southern radius of the moon.

But Crosbi did not think so. Convinced that the settlers, like all pioneers, were stubborn men who held to their purpose, Ace believed they would have traveled westward, instead of east.

The thing that drew Ace east now had added something else. It was an extra sensory impulse that seemed to come from someone he knew.

AHEAD WAS a small mound, a lunar counterpart of a foothill. Actually it was simply a bubble that had not burst to form a crater.

Scaling its glassy walls, Crosbi looked ahead, toward a fully formed crater not a mile in diameter. At the bottom yawned a large hole, a pit. But it was not a natural cavern. It was one that man had dug with small powerful drills.

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Ace signaled for Dag Scanlon to keep out of sight.

The glass bubble on which Ace stood was taller than the lip of the crater and Crosbi could see almost the entire area, except for a small part nearest to where he stood. There was no sign of life.

"Come on," Ace spoke into his microphone.

Using the peculiar gliding walk of a moon-man, Crosbi went down the hillside and climbed the crater wall.

"Ace!"

It was not a sound, not a signal in the earphones of his radio. It was a thought. It was not a word, spoken, but a feeling. Someone wanted Ace. Needed him.

This was followed by a wave of contempt, a sensation of derision. This too was Teq, a telepathic transmission that Crosbi had known before. It was the same sensed impulse that had come to him on his first meeting with Judd Beecher.

Ace slid down the crater side toward the black hole. Above the stars gleamed, although it was daylight beyond the shadow. He saw tracks in the meteoric dust, but these might have been made a few minutes ago, yesterday or a hundred years ago. Nothing changes on the moon, except when man passes by.

Crosbi walked into the hole; Dag Scanlon, with his gun already drawn, came behind him. His wheezing breath whistled in Ace's earphones.

"Turn off your radio," Crosbi said, and then realized his own was on. He switched it off and saw Dag doing likewise as he was silhouetted momentarily in the entrance to the cave.

DARKNESS slid around them. Crosbi put his gloved hand against the cold walls of the moon cave. The sides were rough, chopped out by terrestrial machines. Then the roughness stopped and the walls were smooth as glass. They had entered a natural cavern. But it was not sealed, like the caves of Copernicus and Archimedes.

Suddenly Ace saw light ahead, and he stepped into a large chamber, fully a hundred feet across, lighted by a brilliant flourescence.

In the center was a huge Staghorn crystal, seeming to pulsate as it breathed forth the energy that lit the flourescent material in the walls. Here was indeed proof of an energy man had never dreamed of, the energy Ace called Teq. For Crosbi knew now that the crystals were lodestones of a sort, a magnetism of life energy seemed to give them power. They hypnotised by drawing forth Teq from the eyes of anyone who looked too long.

Ace turned away, but Scanlon was not so fortunate.

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Caught like a luckless fly in a web, he slid to the floor in hypnotic sleep. His finger pulled the trigger of his pistol and fire spouted from its snout.

There was no noise, but the bullet struck the hugh crystal, cracking it through the center.

A wave of Teq anger swept over Crosbi, but it did not come from the crystal. Beyond the crystal stood Judd Beecher, without pressure suit, without even a helmet. His hands were gloved, his face muffled to protect hold his body heat to his skin. He wore heavy clothing, of the type called windproof on earth, but in an airless world, it was radiation proof, keeping the body heat from passing out into space.

And Beecher was not alone. His hand held Diane Boyer's chained wrists. She was space-suit clad, and the window of her helmet was foggy with fear.

SEEING Crosbi, she jerked backward and the motion seemed to catch Beecher by surprise. For a second she was free; in that second, she started to run.

Then Beecher held up his left hand, the hand that had been free as he held the girl. In it was a flat, disc-shaped crystal; he turned it toward the girl.

It was a reflector, with which he caught the radiated Teq from the crystal. It flashed into her back like the stream from a fire hose, hurling the girl upward off the floor.

At that moment Ace Crosbi drew his own pistol.

The disc turned down, caught Crosbi in the chest and he too was bowled off his feet. Diane came to the floor nearby, falling with feather-slowness as she was pulled by lunar gravity.

Ace crawled to his knees.

Again the beam seized him, catching his shoulder, wrenching his arm back. Crosbi's scream of pain inside the helmet almost deafened him as he dropped his pistol. His shoulder hit the cavern wall and he somehow managed to stay on his feet.

Across the room came Judd Beecher, leaping as only a man on the moon can leap. His second bound brought him near Crosbi, and he stooped to pick up the pistol.

Ace gave himself a shove off the cavern wall. He dove straight at Beecher; bowling him to the floor. The crystal disc struck the basalt and shattered, but it was no longer a needed weapon. The hands of both men sought the gun.

Crosbi's wrenched arm was screaming pain. He could not use it, and Beecher had two fighting hands. Seizing his wrist with one hand. Beecher reached for the gun with the other His fingers touched it,

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slid over the grip and then Ace kicked.

HIS KNEE caught Judd Beecher in the groin. Had there been air in Beecher's lungs it would have come out with the single agonizing scream, but Beecher had no air. Leaving Beecher, Ace Crosbi kicked the gun across the cave.

His face was red with exertion and pain now as he dropped on all fours ready to spring at his foe. Ace had risen now and stood legs far apart, ready to receive the charge. His right arm hung useless, already swollen from the wrenching sprain that the beam had given him.

Beecher sprang. His body came like a bullet, scarcely two feet off the floor, for a man can dive far and straight without falling when gravity does not drag him down as it does on earth.

Crosbi dodged; his left arm snaked out, caught Beecher's flying wrist in a relentless grip. And slowly Ace turned, whirling Judd Beecher out like a weight on a string.

Around and around he turned, whirling Judd Beecher out like a weight on a string.

Around and around he turned, for Beecher weighed less than thirty pounds to Crosbi's muscles, which still had the strength of an Earthman's.

Then Ace released his one-armed grip. Judd's body hurtled through the air, straight toward the cracked crystal that still fed flourescence into the cavern walls.

It struck silently and again something cracked; but it was not the crystal. Judd Beecher's spine bent like a hairpin and broke like dried wood.

Ace Crosbi dropped to Diane's side. She opened her eyes and Ace pulled her to her feet. He saw her lips move and realized his radio was off. As it clicked on, he heard his own name repeated over and over.

"Come on, girl, let's get out of here!" said Ace.

He pulled her to her feet. At the entrance to the large cavern they found Dag Scanlon, still sleeping, his hand tightly clenching his pistol. Crosbi took the gun, then stirred Dag with his foot. The gunman opened his eyes.

Ace reached down and turned Scanlon's radio switch. "It's all over, Dag; let's go."

SORE AND weary, they tramped back to the pressure car. It was only when they reached it and had removed their helmets inside, did anyone talk.

"We ought to fill up that hole," said Diane.

Ace Crosbi shook his head. "Staghorn crystals can be useful," he said. "Somehow man has always known there was something on the moon that made men mad. The an-

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cients weren't so far off base, but they'd never heard of a crystal that puts men to sleep like a narcotic. Not farther off than Opewell, when he said they were dope. They are dope, in a way; and like dope, they can help heal or help kill. The moon does make men do strange things, it makes men different, it modifies by environment. You might say that the Staghorn Crystals are the resources of the moon."

Diane nodded agreement. Yes, life forms were carried on by heredity, but it was environment that gave birth to evolution. It is environment that makes mutations and environment that makes life seek its level.

"The crystals are dangerous to man," said Crosbi, "but they are also necessary. Man does not fight electricity, because it is deadly. Nor does he call heat an enemy because it can burn. Man harnesses all other energy and someday he'll harness Teq."

"But until then," said Diane, "let's not play with fire."

"Right," said Crosbi. He held out his hand. From a pocket of her pressure suit, Diane pulled out a tiny, glittering object that looked like a shirt stud. Crosbi took it and dropped it into the disposal chute of the pressure car.

"Want me to drive, Ace?" asked Scanlon. "I don't think you can manage with a bum right arm."

"Sure," said Crosbi. "I'll sit in the back. Diane, do you mind sitting on my left." He paused an instant, then added: "You can sit real close on that side."

★

It seemed simple enough; the jet-powered *Calypso* would land on this icebound planet and pick up the passengers and crew of the wrecked hyperliner. However, Captain Werner had forgotten a few elementary matters in the excitement.

don't miss

QUICK FREEZE

by Robert Silverberg

it leads off the May issue of

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The idea of Equality is a noble one, but it can lead to gruesome errors when it's misinterpreted. After all, there's a vast difference between asserting that all should be equal before the law, that no man should be denied the opportunity to improve himself or his position, and contending that every man is as good as every other man!

THE JANUS CITY

by Irving Cox Jr.

(author of "Mission To The Enemy")

"MAY I come in?" He looked up from the console, smiling hospitably. "Sure thing, Ma'am."

"The supervisor said you wouldn't mind helping me." She glided along the catwalk, the most dazzlingly beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"We don't have visitors very often; I'll be glad to show you around." His tone was an honest reflection of deep pride in his responsibility. To him the Machine was god, the beginning and the end of all things; his reason for being. Beyond the catwalk he could see the turning shaft—a thousand tons of polished metal; a cylinder that sored through the roof of the caverns into the upper levels, even as far as the Creative City itself. The City lived as long as that shaft turned; it was her responsibility to make certain that the Machine never stopped.

"I'm Marcia Pell," she said, "from the Creative City. I'm writing a book—a historical novel—and I need background material. You know: the intimate feel of a worker's life in the caverns --all that sort of thing."

"I don't know much about books, Ma'am," he said awkwardly, a little embarrassed by the forthright display of her physical beauty in the skimpy, semi-transparent worksuit that she wore.

She laughed comfortably. "Oh, I only want you to give me reality of detail. I pride myself on the factual

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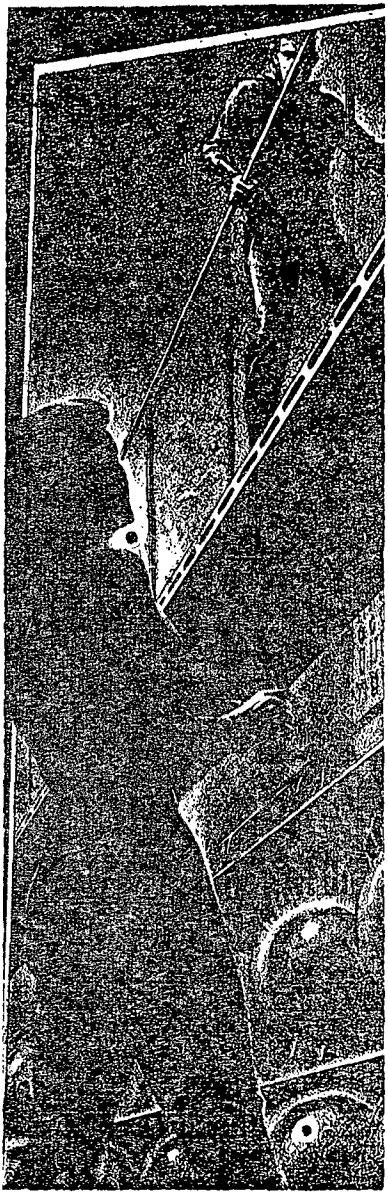

accuracy of my books. My hero will be Sven Langdon. He's a somewhat legendary figure, you know—the leader of the last cavern revolt, before we developed our present Classification System."

Sven Langdon... legendary figure...cavern revolt: the words were meaningless. He remembered something he had learned long ago in the General School, but an accurate chronology of the past had always been beyond him.

"AS OF COURSE you know," Marcia Pell went on, "Langdon's revolt took place about two hundred years ago. However, the typical life in the caverns—the overall emotional atmosphere—will have changed very little." She flipped open a tiny, black notebook and smiled at him brightly. "I'll want the usual statistics first, I think. Your name, if I remember correctly, is Roger Brillen. Classification Bracket 60-65?"

"Yes, Ma'am. My average specific is 64, but I'm a 91 in mechanics."

"Excellent, Roger! Sven Langdon's specific was a 66. Faulty, of course—which was the basic cause of the revolt. At least I'm assuming that for my plot motivation. And how old are you, Roger?"

"Thirty-three in March."

"Ideal for my purposes.

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Langdon was thirty-four at the time of the revolt." She studied him thoughtfully, tapping her pencil against her teeth. "I imagine he resembled you, too—broad-shouldered, sandyhaired good-looking. You know, we've only one picture of Langdon in the archives, and that's a miserable print. I'll have to build him up from scratch. You won't mind serving as a kind of model, Roger?"

"I guess not, Miss Pell." He agreed because he had an agreeable nature, but he didn't quite know what she meant.

"Let's not be so formal. I'm Marcia and you're Roger. After all, we're going to be collaborators for the next few weeks."

"Anything you say—Marcia." He blushed. Marcia Pell was the first woman he had ever spoken to with any intimacy. Roger had not often gone to the Recreation Houses. The Machine had always been enough to satisfy the unsophisticated pattern of his emotional needs. Women embarrassed him, made him shy and tongue-tied. But not Marcia Pell; he felt at ease with her, as he did with the Machine. He began subconsciously to couple them in his mind.

A RED CONSOLE light winked on; Roger made an adjustment of the dials while she watched him. The throb of the turbines changed subtly. He looked anxiously at the whirling shaft and opened the automatic lube valves.

"What was all that for?" she asked when he had finished.

"The interior pressure had decreased on one of the upper levels—the Engineers', I think—and I had to cut in a new turbine bank."

"Then you actually control the nuclear reactors from here?"

"No, Ma'am—no, Marcia, I mean. The power-maker is in the lower cavern. Only the Engineers know how to make it go." As always there was awe in his voice, deep respect, when he spoke of the incomprehensible process which gave life to his Machine.

"You could learn."

"But this is my job, here. I don't understand the rest of it."

"Nonsense, Roger. It's simply a matter of reading the proper books."

"No, I can't—" He looked away from her, ashamed because he had somehow lost her respect. "You see, Marcia, this work is what I like. I don't want to do anything else."

SHE SNAPPED her notebook shut and glanced along the catwalk which circled the metal walls of the cavern. "And you have never

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worked at anything else, Roger?"

"No!" Even the idea of change frightened him. "I took the Classifications when I was ten—as soon as I left the General School—and I've been here ever since." He added, with obvious pride, "Nearly twenty-three years, Marcia."

An expression of horror came into her face. "Twenty-three years in this hole—in this heat! Smelling the hot oil and hearing nothing but the grinding of these turbines! It would drive me mad."

"I have the greatest responsibility in the City. My Machine makes the air and controls the pressure on all the levels. If it stopped for as much as a minute—" He shuddered.

"In a way, our lives are in your hands—Roger Brillen, Specific Classification 64 with a 91 in mechanics. The irony, I hope, doesn't escape you?"

He nodded vaguely, because he knew she expected him to; but he had no idea what she was talking about.

"You're not the only Pressurizer attendant, are you, Roger?"

"I'm the senior," he answered. "I've been here longest. There are none others; we alternate, in four hour shifts."

"The ten men who rule the city," she said languidly, "if they had the sense to know it. An intelligent man would be able to—Roger, you've given me the theme for my book. I know why Langdon revolted!"

THE CONSOLE lights blinked again. He said, over his shoulder as he turned the dials, "My shift will be over in twenty minutes. If you like, we can go up to one of the lounges and talk."

"Not today. Jake said he'd come by for me; he hated me to keep him waiting. But I'll be back tomorrow, Roger. Your supervisor said it was your free day. I want you to show me everything in the caverns—how you live; what you do to amuse yourself. And I want to meet all your friends, especially the other men who service the Pressurizer. That is, if you don't mind?"

"Sure, Ma'am—M a r c i a. You just come whenever you want. I'll show you the works."

She touched his hand gracefully as she departed; he blushed again.

When Roger's relief came, he went up into the entry to sign out. Marcia Pell was still there, talking bitterly to a stranger whose sleek beamcar was racked at the landing in the ascent tube. The newcomer was a thin, stiff-backed man of middle age.

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His graying hair was cut close to his head; and his tanned, sharpboned face seemed very troubled. He wore, as Roger did, the typical City costume—close-fitting trunks and plastic-soled boots. On the waistband of his trunks was the golden insignia of a governing Delegate.

MARCIA SMILED at Roger, but her voice was still sharp with ill-suppressed anger. "This is Jake, Roger—Jake Amaron. He's suddenly come up with the preposterous notion that I ought to give up my new book—try something less controversial, he tells me."

Amaron frowned. "Must we discuss it here, Marcia, in front of—in front of him?"

"Why not?" she demanded furiously. "He's a man, no different from you— not really. And all men are equal. Have you forgotten, Jake? We brought that doctrine with us when we founded the City."

"No one has mentioned the Classifications, Marcia." Amaron sighed wearily. "You always oversimplify, my dear. That's natural, I suppose, since you're a Creative. But —"

"Now, I suppose, you intend to criticise my—"

"I made a simple statement, Marcia; no more and no less. I want you to soft-peddle your crusading this time. Write about anything you please, but don't try to create another parliamentary issue."

She drew herself up haughtily. "I write from my heart, Jake; I call my shots as I see them. If I hit a raw nerve, the government deserves to be embarrassed."

"The only embarrassment, my dear, has been mine. I'm a politician; I can't have my career wrecked in this perpetual comedy of misapplied good intentions. The other Delegates are beginning to wonder why I can't impose at least a minimum of restraint on what you write."

"Try it, Jake—just once. And I'll dissolve our marriage so fast you won't know what hit you."

"That isn't what I want, Marcia; you know that. I love you; I always will. But this lack of responsibility—"

"Restraint!" She spat out the word furiously and tears were in her eyes. "I'm A Creative, Jake. I write as I please; I think as I please."

"I'm sorry, Marcia. I wanted to talk this over quietly, calmly." He tried to put his arm around her waist, but she pulled away from him. "Come home with me now. When you're feeling rested—"

"I'M GLAD this came up, Jake; I'm glad Roger heard what you think of me. Perhaps he'll understand the

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sort of thing I go through when I'm writing a book. The life of a Creative is a torment, with so few satisfactions! How often I wish I'd been born in another Classification. If only I could fulfill myself in something less complex—tending a machine, as Roger does; or supervisvising government finances, like you do, Jake."

"We both understand, Marcia." This time when Amaron drew her into his arms she did not resist. He led her gently toward the door.

Roger watched as their beam-car slid into the ascent tube. He had listened with amazement to their wrangling, but he had actually comprehended very little of it. The undercurrents escaped him. Their argument conveyed the superficial impression that Marcia was severely tormented by her husband, who blindly condemned and criticised her work. She bore her suffering with obvious nobility. Roger's heart went out to her in sympathy. If he could, he would have done anything to ease Marcia's burden.

And he disliked Amaron intensely. The reaction was shaded with jealousy and hope—jealousy, because Amaron was her husband; hope, because she had not yet taken Amaron's name. That meant the marriage was still conditional; either Jake or Marcia could dissolve it simply by publishing a formal notice to that effect.

ROGER TOOK the pedestrian slideway to the cavern residential area, on the first level above the Machine. The area was still underground, but the walls and the roof broadened out to create an illusion of openness. The concealed artificial lighting, the continuous zephyr of fragrant, clean air, and the ornamental trees and shrubs completed the illusion. Roger never felt dissatisfaction with the place where he lived; he never envied the upper levels nor yearned to see the actual out-of-doors—which here was a parched, red desert, swept with gales of chlorine and burned by the white light of twin suns.

The atmosphere was a breathable compound of oxygen, but the chlorine made it almost unendurable. As a consequence, the City was built beneath a protective dome, and no man went outside without being masked. The familiar beauty and comfort of the City was an idealization of the parent world, which Roger's ancestors had left more than a thousand years ago.

A place called Earth: he had learned that, too, in the General School. It was the only habitable planet in a sun

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system twenty light years away, on the fringe of the galaxy. Roger had no idea what the astronomical terms actually meant, except that the distance was beyond understandable measurement. It had taken the original colonists two generations to reach their new world, granted to them in perpetual charter by the earth government.

They had called their colony Janus because of the twin suns, and because of the two-faced nature of the terrain: a blazing surface of desert waste which hid a core of limitless natural resources. Janus had not been a commercial colony; their world was too far from the centers of human population for profitable exploitation. The colonists had come, rather, to build a City where their social concepts might develop in peace.

"In a very real sense, we were like the Pilgrims who established the Colony of Massachusetts so very long ago."

HOW OFTEN the General School teacher had made that explanation to Roger's class! She had intended to clarify a point, but she had only increased his confusion. The colonists to Roger's world had crossed through the sky; the Massachusetts Pilgrims had floated over an unimaginably wide body of water called an ocean. Roger could visualize no similarity between the two.

Since the sunlight never waned on Janus, the day in the City was an arbitrary division of hours marked by the dimming or brightening of the artifical lights beneath the dome. Night was simply an eight hour period of darkness during which the colony slept; morning was the designation for the time when the lights came on again. Roger knew no other definition.

The next day, after morning, Roger was watching the Story-channel on the screen in in his dormitory room when Marcia Pell came to see him. He was sorry he had to snap off the adventure before he saw how it came out. Roger had no hobbies; he hated to read; and he never really enjoyed the Recreation Houses. The Story-channel was his chief form of free-time relaxation.

But Marcia was here, and he was pleased about that, too. He had been afraid that Amarón would persuade her to give up her book. Then she would have had no reason to return to the caverns; obscurely Roger felt he would personally lose something if that happened.

MARCIA SEEMED to be in a happier mood. Apparently her differences with

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her husband had been settled. She inspected Roger's room minutely, jotting notes rapidly in her black notebook. "You've always lived here?" she asked.

"Ever since I was apprenticed to the Machine."

"But your room seems so bare. So expressionless. Why, you've no scheme of decoration at all; not a picture on the walls!"

"Oh, I could put up some paintings if I wanted to ask Supply for them. But I don't understand the pictures you Creatives make, and they bother me."

"Are most of the other dormitory rooms like yours?"

"I haven't seen any very different."

She shuddered. "So Sven Langdon lived in this sort of cultural poverty! No wonder he revolted."

She snapped on his screen and the tail end of the adventure swam into focus. "Surely you weren't watching that, Roger?"

"Yes; it was an awfully good one this time."

Marcia shuddered again. "I know precisely how good, my friend: I had to write the dialogue. But how can you stomach this tripe on the Story-channel?"

"I never watch anything else."

"The material on the A and B programs is so much richer, so much more informative."

He laughed uncomfortably. "But I don't understand them."

"The Story-channel dishes up nothing but childish pap, Roger— a romantic opiate. It keeps your mind in chains."

HE DIDN'T know how to answer that one, so he said nothing. But he was puzzled that she disapproved of his taste. He would have promised to change, if she had asked it; but he knew that no degree of determination would make the other programs any clearer. Besides, what difference did it make? The Story-channel was fun; it always held him entranced. Why shouldn't he watch it?

"I suppose, Roger, you've never married?"

"You don't, when you work in the caverns."

She was at once aroused: her face flushed with anger. "You mean they've actually told you, you can't?"

"Oh, no, Marcia! There's no law against it. We— we just don't. There are cavern women in the Recreation Houses for us, of course—"

"It's psychological compulsion; they've taken away your rights as a free man." She jammed her plastic writer so furiously against the page of her notebook that the implement broke in two. "I understand Sven Langdon, now— thoroughly. Such brutality must be exposed."

"I'm afraid I've given you.

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the wrong idea, Marcia. There's nothing brutal about it. We're allowed to marry, if we want to; some of us have. I'll show you the dorms where they live."

Impulsively she took his hand and held it, gently caressing his fingers as if he were a little child. Enormous, glistening tears welled from the depths of her blue eyes. "Yes, dormitory marriage, where they can drug the food; there are never any children, of course."

"Why, now that you mention it—"

"I promise you this, Roger," she said huskily, "I'll write my book. Nothing's going to stop me, not even Jake. It's your book, too, Roger; it will give you your freedom."

"But I'm free now. We all are. That's why the City was built, so men could— could—" He reached desperately into the dim haze of his mind for the phrase he had learned in the General School, and he quoted it brightly, *"Janus was founded so that all men could realize the ultimate potential of individual creativeness.'"*

"Janus: sly, ambiguous, two-faced," she said bitterly. "Our world was rightly named. With my own eyes I want to see the whole truth, Roger, so I can paint it accurately for my readers. Show me everything in the caverns. I want to pull away the mask and show this terrible thing we've done."

FOR TWO WEEKS, Marcia Pell spent the day with Roger whenever he had the time free. She came frequently to watch him while he tended his Machine, and he thought she had learned to respect it and worship it as he did. Slowly his mind-picture of Marcia fused with his idea of the Machine. The two became identical. He would have done anything within his power to satisfy the demands of either.

Marcia undertook what she termed his re-education. She talked interminably about his rights. To please her, he pretended to understand, but the flood of abstractions left his mind in chaos. He was quite satisfied with things as they were, but Marcia refused to believe that. So Roger learned to parrot her phrases of discontent, because that was what she seemed to want.

As she became acquainted with Roger's friends, she attempted to re-educate them, too—particularly the other nine men who served Roger's Machine. They listened and they quoted what they learned, because they were all subconsiously in love with her. Her dazzling beauty, her sensitive emotional reactions—like a synthesis of all the exciting heroines on the Story-channel—and the dynamic glow of her personality were incomprehen-

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sible to them, but delightfully narcotic.

MANY TIMES she took Roger in a beam-car to the upper levels of the City, even to the Creative City at the top of the Janus pyramid. She persisted in believing he was not permitted to go to the upper levels alone, and eventually he believed that, too—although, at the same time, he knew he was free to roam where he pleased and to use any City facility he chose.

Suddenly, late at night, Marcia fled to Roger in terror. She pounded on the door of his dormitory room until he admitted her. Then she clung in his arms, weeping hysterically.

"Don't let them take me, Roger!"

"Who? Where?"

"Jake. He betrayed me, Roger, you have to find a place for me to hide somewhere in the caverns."

Roger tried to shake the fog of sleep out of his brain. "I don't get it. Tell me what's happened."

"A week ago Jake brought a friend home to live with us. Such a nice man! So easy to talk to. And friendly. He wanted to know all about my work. He even let me read him the first two chapters of my Langdon book. Now it turns out this—this friend is an alienist, he was testing me. They've decided to send me to a hospital. I heard them talking tonight, when they thought I was asleep."

"You always go to the hospital when you're hurt, Marcia. It's nothing to be afraid of."

"Nothing's wrong with me!" she screamed at him. "Understand that, Roger."

"Well, you look all right. What's an alienist?"

"A kind of doctor; a quack. I've no time to explain. You have to find a place for me to hide, so I can go on with my work."

"MAYBE AL could help; he's in Agricultural Maintenance. He knows the caverns like a book."

"Yes, get Al; he's a good boy. We've talked a lot. Al knows how much I'm trying to help you people." Her trembling fingers closed tight on his upper arm. "Will you make me one promise. Roger?"

"Sure, Marcia; anything you ask."

"When Jake comes for me, don't give me up, whatever happens. Jake and the others —they'll make all sorts of promises. Don't listen to them, Roger! They'll tell you anything just to get their hands on me."

"You'll be safe, Marcia."

"You've promised, Roger; remember, you've promised!"

Her insistance affronted him. With dignity he said, "I have never broken my word. Responsibility is the one duty

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we owe all men. When I say that I will help you—"

"I'm doing it all for you. You know that, don't you, Roger?"

"You'll be safe here, Marcia." Timidly he drew his arm around her waist. She made no attempt to resist; she even let him kiss her.

WITH HIS soul singing, he went to summon Al. As soon as Al knew it was Marcia who was in trouble, he was more than eager to help. After some debate, they decided to install her in an abandoned tool shed near one of the Recreation Houses. But the shed was filled with debris and filth: certainly no fit sanctuary for Marcia Pell. Al awoke two of his fellow-workers in Agricultural Maintenance to help him clear it out. Again Marcia's name was a magic sesame to an immediate response. Later others had to be let into the secret, in order to assure Marcia a suitable supply of food and necessities.

By morning the news was more or less general throughout the caverns. Nothing so dramatic had ever occurred before to any of them. Those who knew Marcia, or who had attended her sessions of re-education, were fanatically loyal to her. If she said her husband was persecuting her, then unquestionably that was what had happened. She deserved their protection.

The other people in the caverns who knew of the conspiracy entered into it with childish delight. One of them expressed the thinking of the group when he said to Roger, "It's like being in one of the Story-channel adventures, isn't it?"

WHEN AMARON came he was met by a united front of stubborn silence. Roger refused to make even monosyllabic answers to Amaron's questions, for fear he would unwittingly betray Marcia's hiding place.

Amaron went away, but two hours later he returned with half a dozen other government Delegates. They contronted Roger while he worked at his Machine. A stranger—introduced as Mr. Pike, Chairman of the Council—acted as spokesman.

"The disappearance of Miss Pell has become a matter for government intervention," he said stiffly.

"Why?" Roger demanded. "She's done no harm. On Janus each of us is always free to—"

"Miss Pell is a sick woman; she needs medical aid."

"I saw her. She wasn't hurt anywhere, she didn't tell me she was sick."

"All illness, I'm afraid, isn't quite so easily diagnosed. Miss Pell's mind is sick. She's suffering a complex of—"

"I never heard such nonsense!" Roger's lips curled in a sneer and he jabbed his

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thumb at Amaron. "You're lying, because he wants you to."

Mr. Pike sighed. "We've talked to the others, Roger. You're our last resort. You know her better than they do. Surely you must realize that her thinking isn't quite normal."

"What's wrong with it? She talks just like all the Creatives."

"Then you refuse to help us?"

"I gave Marcia my promise."

"Then listen to our ultimatum; it might change your mind. Unless you surrender her within an hour, the Council will deputize an Emergency Guard to search the caverns by force. We'll take legal measures, then, against any man who opposes us."

THE DELEGATION turned and departed. Roger was paralyzed by their threat. "Legal measures" in the City of Janus meant one thing: expulsion from the City. An outlaw was driven from the protection of the dome and never readmitted. It was not a death sentence—which, perhaps, made it worse. A man could find brackish water in the depths of the desert canyons, and the unpalitable fungus which grew on the shaded rocks was both edible and nourishing. But the criminal was condemned to breathe the chlorine atmosphere for the rest of his life—condemned to bleary, smarting eyes, to a parched throat and an unquenchable thirst.

Roger summoned an emergency relief and went out into the caverns. The ultimatum had left the others as paralyzed with fear as he was. No one knew what to do. They were still loyal to Marcia; they all shared subtly in the responsibility of the promise Roger had made to her. Yet now they were opposed by the full authority of the government; they had an equivalent responsibility to obey the law.

ROGER WENT to see Marcia. She was a Creative. She could think clearly in any situation; certainly she would know a way out of the impasse. Since she had always been so noble, he fully expected her to release him from his promise. But instead she declared, "Perfect, Roger! This is precisely what we want."

"A government ultimatum? I don't see how that can help you, Marcia."

"I'm not important, Roger. I'm simply a means to an end—an instrument of justice. If they actually deputize an Emergency Guard, you people in the caverns must resist them."

He was frankly shocked. "You're suggesting that we defy the law?"

"The law is your enemy; the law keeps you in chains." She put her hand on his

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shoulder. "Remember your heritage: you are a man, and men have always been willing to fight—to die, if need be—for liberty and justice."

"The Guard will be issued weapons, Marcia; we have nothing."

"Every cause needs martyrs; Sven Langdon said that long ago."

"Oh, I don't think so, Marcia. Langdon didn't—"

"He will in my book," she snapped, "and that amounts to the same thing."

"He didn't want anyone to be hurt. That's why he kept the Machine running, even during the revolt."

She looked into his face and slowly she began to smile. "I'd overlooked that, Roger: you do have a weapon—the Pressurizer. You can go on strike. *Force* them to make concessions."

He was bewildered. "Strike? Concessions? I don't know the words."

"It was always the worker's weapon, back on Earth. We've tried to breed it out of you here. We'll meet Jake's threat with one of our own. I'm going to the Pressurizer room, Roger. You call the others together—the men who service the Machine with you—and bring them there. Hurry! They've given us only an hour."

IN TWENTY minutes the men were assembled on the catwalk beside the console. Slowly hundreds of other workers flocked curiously into the cavern outside the entry room. In a shrill, excited, almost breathless voice Marcia addressed the throng. From the catwalk Roger heard only snatches of her speech, but it must have been inspiring because the crowd cheered her repeatedly.

When Marcia returned to the catwalk, her face was flushed with excitement; her eyes blazed with a cold, sapphire fire. She radiated a feeling of crisis, a hypnotic conviction. What she said, what she did would be right. Roger felt that instinctively, as the other men did. Marcia was suddenly something more than human. For Roger, her identification with the Machine was complete.

"Jake will come any minute," she said. Her voice was still high-pitched, as if she were addressing a throng. She looked at the men blindly, her eyes fixed on a distant horizon, an inner vision of her own. "He will bring an Emergency Guard. They will be armed. They will threaten to kill us all." She gestured toward the console. "There's our answer. If they make one move against us, we'll shut the valves on every level. We'll cut the City pressure to—"

"Stop the Machine?" Roger asked hoarsely. "The dome would collapse. It would destroy the City!"

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"Not the caverns, Roger; they're underground."

"But it's our responsibility—"

"They've taught you this sacred worship of responsibility in order to make things easy for themselves. Face reality, Roger! This is our opportunity to achieve equality—fredom, liberty! Besides, we're only making a threat; we wouldn't really shut off the Machine."

One of the men said slowly, "We have to fight for our rights; you've always told us that, Marcia."

"For justice; for equality!"

THE MEN caught the infection of her ringing enthusiasm. Roger was almost carried with them, but he glanced up at the whirling shaft of the Machine and he felt the cold, knife-edge of doubt. Even to suggest stopping the Machine was a betrayal of his trust, of himself. A denial of the only god he knew. His life was the Machine, the beginning and the end of all things; his reason for being.

None of the other men had ever felt Roger's sense of dedication. He tried to explain, but the right words did not come; and Marcia slashed his bumbling argument with ridicule. She created such confusion in his mind that Roger began to question his own conviction.

It was then that Amaron and the armed Emergency Guard appeared at the far end of the catwalk.

"Stay where you are," Marcia called out imperiously, "or we shall shut down the Pressurizer."

"Don't be ridiculous," Amaron answered. "These men have been taught since childhood—"

"I've done some re-education." Marcia's voice bubbled with triumph. "The men are with me." She glanced toward the console, and one by one the men—even Roger—nodded their agreement.

AMARON wrung his hands. "Marcia, this is utterly fantastic. What can you possibly hope to gain?"

"For myself—" She lifted her head proudly. "—nothing. A footnote, perhaps, in the future history of Janus. I ask no other reward. But for these poor, downtrodden souls in the caverns, I will settle for nothing less than equality."

"Freedom and liberty," the men echoed in a dutiful chorus.

"They have that now!"

"Your lies won't work, Jake; the men know the truth. Is it equality when they must slave here in the caverns to keep the City alive, while the Creatives live in ease and comfort?"

Amaron turned toward the men. "Tell me precisely what you want that you don't have now?"

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After a long silence, Roger whispered, "Concessions." It was the word he had learned from Marcia; it should have been the right answer.

But Amaron demanded scornfully, "What kind of concessions, Roger?"

Roger was lost. He shot an appealing glance at Marcia as he replied, "Equality. We want to be equal. All men are equal. It's our right as men."

"Marcia, your re-education seems to have bogged down on the level of abstractions," Amaron said dryly. "Let's see if we can make any of this specific. Do you want shorter hour shifts, Roger?"

"Oh, no!" Roger thought he was on safe ground here. "I'd rather spend more time with the Machine."

YET EVEN that seemed to be the wrong answer, because Marcia cut in angrily, "Of course they do, Jake. And they want the right to go anywhere in the City they please."

"They have that now."

"To marry and bear children."

"There's no law—".

"But psychological pressure. I understand that, Jake, even if these poor people don't." Marcia had found a tangible issue, and for the first time Amaron seemed frightened.

"You're a fool," he said quickly. "You know we have to maintain a balanced population."

"At the expense of these people."

"Of all of us, Marcia. The same Classification is applied to every child on every level."

"Then the Classification System must be abolished."

Amaron appealed directly to the men again. "You're happy; you're successful; you're doing what you enjoy. Can't you see that this woman's trying to destroy all that? Her mind is sick. Surrender her to us so we can—"

"He's lying," Marcia said coldly. "You know he's lying. He wants to take me away because I'm trying to help you."

Amaron glared at the men; no one spoke. Then Jake asked slowly, "You won't give her up?"

"No," Roger answered; without hesitation the other nine men echoed the same response.

Jake dropped his hands helplessly. "When I came here, I was empowered to do a certain amount of bargaining, but not on as fundamental a point as this. Janus would be in chaos if we abandoned the Classifications."

"We'll settle for nothing less," Marcia declared.

FOR A MOMENT Amaron conferred in whispers with the Guard. One of the armed men left: the others gathered close behind Amaron and the group began to move imperceptibly along the catwalk

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toward the console.

"I've sent for Mr. Pike. In the meantime, perhaps we can work out a basic agreement."

"The Classification System must go," Marcia repeated.

"Naturally, my dear. We can't let you destroy the City." Amaron looked at Roger, and his face seemed strangely twisted with emotional pain. "You men are all in the 60-65 Bracket. That means you don't readily grasp the significance of abstracts, but I'm going to try to explain the Classification to you."

Marcia laughed. "You don't dare, Jake! Would you tell a man to his face that he's a—"

"The Bracket numbers," Amaron went on doggedly, "tell us at a glance what your average intellectual potential is. The Classification System is a refinement of a primitive intelligence test which men worked out centuries ago on Earth. We've made ours so exact that we've been able to build a functioning society from it. The normal man would be in the 95-105 Bracket. The Creatives rate above 140."

"He's saying you're a Moron," Marcia said to Roger. "Can you bargain with a man who holds that opinion of you?"

"You know," Roger replied slowly, "he's right about some of it, as nearly as I can understand. I don't grasp complicated ideas very quickly. Many times, not at all. That's why I don't watch the A or B programs, I think."

AMARON continued to move toward them, with his men packed close behind him.

"A Classification is nothing to be ashamed of, Roger," Amaron explained persuasively. "We administer the tests in the General School. They tell us exactly what you're like, what kind of work you will do with the greatest personal satisfaction. You see, all men *aren't* created equal. But that doesn't matter, if we see to it that you don't learn ambitions for a status you can never achieve. Our objective on Janus is maximum individual satisfaction. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then you must also understand that the Classification System has given you happiness and a feeling of accomplishment. Wouldn't it be foolish to give it up?"

"Don't listen to him!" Marcia cried hysterically. "Jake can twist anything to make it look right. You're men; never forget it. It's your privilege to live where you please, do any kind of work you please. You could be Creatives, if you chose!"

"I—I'm not sure," Roger answered. "I'd rather be here with my Machine. I don't know how to be a Creative."

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She began to weep. "You're betraying me—all of you! People always have. You, Jake: you brought that filthy doctor into the house, and you let him read my book. And now you, Roger. I would have given my life to—my life—"

Marcia's voice trailed off. Very languidly she turned and looked at the console. Amaron and the Guard were still twenty feet away. They began to run toward her.

"Stop her!" Amaron cried.

BUT NEITHER Roger nor any of the nine men with him had the wit to grasp, at once, what Marcia intended to do. Roger watched incredulously while she darted to the console and twisted the bank of dials. The rows of warning lights winked on.

One of the Emergency Guard raised his weapon and fired at her.

Marcia whirled as she fell. There was a smile on her face—a smile of satisfaction and triumph. She collapsed across the console. The glass shattered. Her dead hand dragged at the network of wires, and a shattering blue flame lit the room. The churning shaft ground to a stop.

The turbines on the level below began to turn faster. The throb became a hum, the hum a siren scream. Roger was caught in a tidal wave of blind panic. He turned and fled, fighting viciously to reach the entry.

The ascent tunnel was empty. Roger reached the first level of the upper city before he plunged into chaos. People were streaming toward the airlocks. Overhead the enormous girders were buckling, while great blocks of the dome broke loose and crashed into the screaming throng.

ROGER WAS swept along with the throng and, because the mouth of the tunnel was close to the lock, he escaped. Escaped into the blazing sunlight and the acrid, chlorine gale.

He stood rubbing his eyes and coughing, while behind him the City of Janus crumbled into ruin.

The handful of survivors had all come from the first level or the caverns. Helpless, choking, bleary eyed they picked through the debris, trying to comprehend the disaster. It was too great. Magnitude destroyed its significance. In a moment their world had been lost. Why? How? No one quite knew, not even Roger.

Dazed and choking, he stumbled upon a tunnel that was not clogged with debris. Instinctively he worked his way down into the caverns. That was where he belonged. That was home. He would be safe there, secure. The nightmare would be over.

But it wasn't. The chlorine had penetrated even into the

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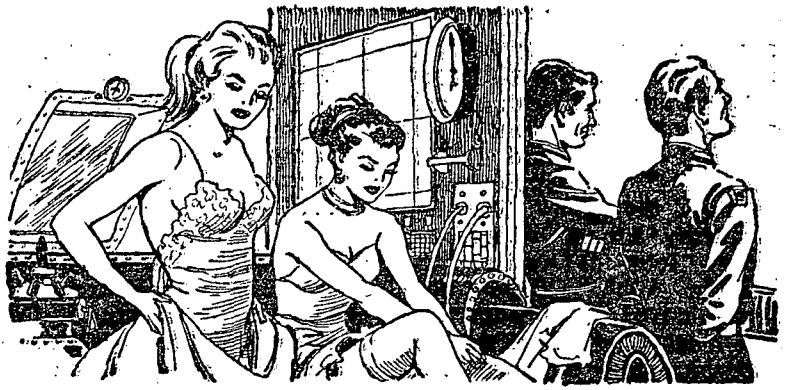

illustration by ORBAN

PLEASURE ORBIT

by Winston K. Marks

Wherein a pair of Hollywood gals on a scavenger hunt try to bring back a pair of spacemen . . .

THE MAN in the green tux mounted the grand piano and held up his hands for attention. The revelers focussed on him through a fog of champagne and cigaret smoke.

"Time for the scavenger hunt," green tux announced. There were moans and a few impolite sighs. "The assignments are very easy, so the prize will go to the couple that shows the most imagination in the selection of their specimens. Since we are all engaged in the business of make-believe, let's see you hold up the tradition of Hollywood and bring in some lulus!"

He went on, "For a change, we will pair off men together and ladies together. Hector Ford and Clifton Montgomery, your assignment is to bring back two—lady wrestlers. Now, you see, that's strictly a man's job, isn't it?"

The little wave of boredom vanished from the movie colonists. When Harry Hope gave

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a party, the saying went, if nothing else it was different.

"And our first team of lady scavengers will consist of Gloria Gruen and Alata Smythe—" A ripple went through the group. The two Academy Award winners, fiery, lean Gloria "the Blonde Whip" Gruen and flame-haired, voluptuous Alata "Miss Sine Wave of '96" Smythe, each stepped forward in her own patented method of locomotion and displayed the considerable "talents" of limb and torso that had contributed so heavily in the winning of their Oscars.

"Girls, you have only to round up two drunken sailors. Let's see what kind of news you can make without the help of your publicity agents—and no fair using knockout drops."

EVERYONE laughed. The tacit reason for a working picture personality's attending these affairs was to provide the cosy, intimate little morsels of human interest and gossip that were the life's blood of successful publicity. So Gloria and Alata smiled grimly and retired to discharge their obligation to the party.

Outside the pretentious Hollywood mansion Gloria asked worriedly, "What'll we do? We can't just go down to Vine and cruise around."

Alata exhaled contemptuously. "Not on your life, sister. I have an idea. Do you have your boat here?"

Gloria nodded.

"Good! No salt-water swabbies for us. Now over in Nevada..."

THE NEW VEGAS airport was separated from the spaceport by a single long narrow building through which filtered all human traffic connected in any way with space travel from the Western Hemisphere.

Somewhere near the center of the mile-long structure was a magnificent bar, and among half a thousand others patronizing the expensive potables were two intrepid officers of the spaceship *Orion*. Except for a difference of one gold bar on their expensively tailored, maroon uniforms they were practically interchangeable. They were small, deep-chested little fellows with corded necks, broad, intelligent brows and the quick, athletic appearance of bantamweight boxers.

They were sharing a fifth of Scotch and mild despondency of the pre-flight blues at the moment. Their two-week's leave was over when the *Orion* blasted off at 0800, the following morning.

"We shouldn't bitch," said First Officer Casey Fuller. "We have had a very pleasant fortnight, I would say."

Second Officer Wally Brady refilled their Old-fashion

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glasses with straight Scotch. "Oh, it's this checking in 12 hours early that gets me. A man can do a lot of living in half a day."

"Oh, I don't know," Casey replied. "I'm pretty well caught up, I guess. Of course, I wouldn't mind getting a little ahead. 'Sa shame you can't store up that stuff."

They bent their elbows in unison and stared at their distorted images through the heavy-bottomed glasses. Casey brought his down first. The mirror in the back-bar revealed something that looked good even distorted. He spun on his stool. "Well, good evening!"

WALLY SNAPPED his head around. The red-headed vision behind him turned to a blonde companion and said. "They're cute."

The blonde appraised them with a faintly bloodshot eye. "Rather small, don't you think?"

Casey intruded into the conversation. "Five-foot-six is max in our profession, honey. Name is Casey Fuller, call me Casey. Small but potent."

Alata argued, "And obviously they're drunk. They qualify."

"Very well," Gloria said. "We'll take these two."

"By all means, take these two," Wally said, sliding to his feet. The men were barely eye-to-eye with the girls, but this was a common point of view for the space-men. "You girls look familiar," Wally said. "Haven' we met? Very familiar."

Casey grinned. "They should. Wally, meet the Blonde Whip, also known as Gloria-the-Gorgeous Gruen. And this is Miss Alata Sine-wave Smythe. Girls, meet Wally Brady, master space-mechanic and second officer, ship's company, the Orion."

"Yes," said Alata vaguely, then she turned it on. "Boys, let us take you away from all this for a few hours. We have a boat."

"Let's cut an orbit!" Gloria contributed somewhat synthetically.

Wally winked at Casey. "See, we're not as haggard-looking as you thought." Then his face fell.

GLORIA said, "What's the matter, sailors? Don't we stack up?"

"Sure, sure, you're stacked—I mean you check out fine with us," Casey said sadly. "But we ship out at 0800 tomorrow."

"We'll be back in 90 days, though," Wally said hopefully.

"Come," said Alata. "It's not even midnight yet. We'll have you back in plenty of time; just a little ride in the moonlight?" She made a tiny, three-dimensional motion about her famous center-of-gravity. Not to be outdone, Gloria launched a faint rip-

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ple from her internationally acclaimed knees. It worked its way up her sinuous body and culminated in a naughty flip of her platinum head.

Casey followed every centimeter of the ripple with intense interest. It was even more effective off the screen. Her body held the charms, but he liked best what he saw at the end—the invitation was in her eyes.

"Bartender," he roared with an amazing voice for his stature, "a full one, to go. Scotch, and on the double!" He stripped a tenner from his tunic and thrust it back over the bar without removing his eyes from the feast before them. The note was replaced with the neck of a wrapped bottle, and the party moved to the airport-side exit.

Two paces ahead with Alata, Wally weaved slightly and turned his head. "Casey, I think I fell into the last double Scotch. But don't pull me out. Don't resushitate me—let me drown!" He looked into Alata's eyes that were green even in the pale light of the stars and cresent moon.

AS THEY moved out on the paved strip the midnight ship for Mars blossomed over the roof of the building behind them, and the billowing crimson set fire to Alata's hair. The ponderous ship rose majestically with the roar of a hundred hurricanes. The red faded to a yellow dot that winked out suddenly, and a few seconds later came the thunderclap as the mighty vessel cracked into hyper-drive.

"Minutes to Mars," Gloria breathed. "I don't understand it at all. Maybe you can explain it to me—Casey?"

"Sorry, baby. No shop talk tonight," he grinned. "And incidentally, in what are we taking our little ride? I hope she's gyroed."

She pointed ahead to her sleek, twenty-footer on the edge of the strip. She squeezed his arm and assured, "She's gyroed."

In the pleasant confusion handing in the ladies and doing a lot of unnecessary jostling in the small quarters, Casey and Wally unexpectedly found themselves in the rear lounge deck, and the girls occupying the two pilot seats ten feet forward in the bow. Before they could protest, Gloria touched the door switch, it plopped shut with a rubbery thud and she had the tiny vessel in the air scudding up and into the West.

Counting on the heavy acceleration to pin her passengers to the cushions, Gloria did not figure on the spacemen's steel-spring construction.

CASEY whispered to Wally, "Maybe they're just

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being coy, but I have the strange feeling we are being *delivered* rather then escorted. Let's see just what *is* the orbit."

With easy effort he grasped the corded horizontal rope that rimmed the interior and hauled himself forward quietly. Very gently he raised the little shimmer of platinum hair and fastened a kiss on the smooth nape of Gloria's neck.

Be it recorded for posterity and to the credit of spacemen's legendary virility, this particular kiss was the sole cause of what happened.

Gloria's smoothly tapered fingers clutched on the controls and one quivering knee jerked convulsively against the leg-throttle. First Officer Casey Fuller did a back-flip and whumped into the stomach of his prostrate shipmate, as the pleasure craft dished up through the stratosphere.

Wally was green, and Casey choked the tongue out of his throat where the unexpected acceleration had thrust it. The air grew alarmingly warm and the stars ceased their twinkling. Suddenly the straining craft went limp, and the movie stars sank loosely in their seats. The compressed cushions under the space-men expanded and cast them gently toward the overhead. A wisp of smoke gathered bud-like from a loose cushion that had floated up and touched the bare chrome near a rear port.

CASEY SWAM forward, squeezed between the two unconcious women and took readings. They were still boring a hole into space, but as he held a fix the curvature became apparent. Wally came forward. "Ten hours fuel in forty seconds," he muttered. "Kind of impetuous, aren't they."

Casey checked distance from the over-size basketball darkly beneath and behind them. "Better unwrap the Scotch," he ordered. "The girls will need some."

At that moment Academy Award Winner Gloria Gruen opened her lustrous eyes, and eschewing the thousands of dramatic and expensively produced scenario lines memorized for just such occasions, gargled mundanely, "Where am I?"

In the act of touching the full whiskey bottle to Alata's lax mouth, Wally told her, "You're one drink behind, beautiful." He took a jolt himself and handed the flexible crystal flask to Casey. Casey moistened Gloria's lips with the liquor and then helped himself—to the Scotch. At the moment, the full lips of his dream-companion were a somehow untempting purple, and the untempered moon-glow through the curved bow-plate was not

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flattering in what it revealed.

"Let's get them—comfortable," Casey suggested. They floated the girls over the seats and back among the cushions and hovered over them thoughtfully.

Wally said, "Fragile things, aren't they?" He rubbed his hands together. "Imagine, adrift in space with two—"

"Hold it, goatboy! Not until they're fully concious." Casey insisted. He moved back to the control pit and checked instruments and gauges. "Out of fuel," he announced.

GLORIA'S voice came up to him weakly. "The reserve should be full."

"Oh, yeah." Casey cut in the auxiliary line and tried to fire off. "No dice! I'm afraid you sort of burnt things up. We were down in the nice thick air when you opened up full jet." He gave up and returned to the threesome.

Gloria was pinching Alata's cheeks and shaking her. The red-head stirred and opened her eyes. Wally showed them how to glug a drink out of the bottle in free flight, and they all had a round. Alata rubbed the back of her neck tenderly and surveyed things distastefully. She stared at Wally and Casey in bewilderment for a moment then remembered.

"Oh, the drunken sailors! Still with us, eh? Well, Gloria we're a couple of effective scavengers, but you sort of fell down in the transportation department. The plot is fouled. What are we doing floating around up here? Let's get back to the party."

"Party?" Wally asked. "Who's going to a party. We're cutting an orbit, remember?" He reached down and touched her cheek lightly with the back of his fingers.

"Getcher goddammed hands offa me, you midget!" she cried, springing up and banging her head ungently on the thinly upholstered roof.

GLORIA, meanwhile, was firmly untangling herself from Casey's arm and losing her temper in the process. "Look, now, this was all a little gag, but it's ice cold now. Explain how we got up here, please," she demanded coldly. She pointed out a port that revealed earth a dusky ball just showing a faint corona to the East.

"*You* were at the controls," Casey stated. "You tell us."

"I was at—?" Then she remembered. "Oh, that was a dirty, stinking trick. I wasn't expecting—"

Casey was puzzled. He looked at her curiously. "Just what *were* you expecting? And what's this business of a scavenger hunt?"

Alata had managed to stop

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oscillating and hook one shapely arm through a ceiling grip-loop. Her diaphonous, emerald gown floated out like a hoop skirt displaying the limbs that launched a million pin-ups. "You didn't think this joy-ride was on the level, did you? You guys are just a couple of specimens—two drunken sailors we were to bring back to a party out in Hollywood—win a prize or some stupid thing. Give me another drink, and maybe I can remember why it sounded like fun at the time."

CASEY'S eyes narrowed a hair at the unpleasant revelation but he pushed the bottle at her. She captured it and sucked at it noisily. "Wish somebody would turn on the gravity in here. I don't like it this way at all."

Gloria voiced a disturbing thought. "Are we drifting away from earth?"

"No, dammit," he said, "but it would serve you right. We are cutting an orbit, but it couldn't be any sloppier if you'd have plotted it on purpose. I regret to announce that your party will be over before you get back. Meanwhile, it looks like you're pickelled in the same jar with your specimens."

"Specimens, are we?" Wally said, then he looked down at his chronometer. "Hey, we gotta get back before—"

Casey's face lighted for a moment then froze to an inscrutable mask. He interrupted solemnly, "Let's concentrate on the first part. *We got to get back.* The oxygen won't last forever." Wally looked at him with a raised eyebrow, then he, too, composed his features.

Gloria stared from one to the other. "Well fix things. Do something. Mr. Brady, you're a mechanic, aren't you?"

Before Wally could answer, Casey cut in. "There's only one chance, and it involves—going outside," he said dramatically.

"What's—wrong?" Gloria demanded.

"Those fancy, chrome jet-pipes," Casey explained. "They couldn't take that kind of abuse. The tips collapsed from the heat, melted and crimped shut. What's more," he wrenched at a short handle over the pilot's seat, "the seal on the retractable antenna is welded, so we can't even call for help. So—one of us has to go out and knock that fused tip off the jet-pipe."

WITH THAT announcement, he unsnapped the carpet and peeled back a portion to unlatch the door of the tool locker. He found a heavy wrench. "One good lick with this should knock off the crystallized metal," he said confidently. He stripped back more carpet baring the cargo-dump lock.

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It was a sort of one-way escape hatch, designed so that freight objects could be dropped or weight jettisoned without disturbing the interior air-pressure seriously.

He lifted the inner, convex lid and gazed into the shallow, cylindrical space just large enough for a small person to curl up in it. The only catch being that once outside, there was no provision for reentry.

Wally boggled, for it was evident that Casey's proposal was suicidal. "Are you drunker than you look, boy? That's a one-way ticket. Anyway, the patrol will—"

"Yes, I know!" Casey gave Wally a hard look. "The patrol may spot us up here eventually, old friend. But when? Even after the jet is free, it will take time and oxygen to get down."

The cabin air had cooled, but a film of perspiration covered the girls' faces. Casey noted it and went on swiftly with a note of urgency. "I'm really responsible for this." He looked at Gloria and then dropped his eyes to the deck. "If I hadn't—well, it's too late for apologies. I fouled the works, so it's up to me."

HE RUMMAGED around under the false deck and came up with the standard low-pressure emergency mask required by craft powered to enter thin air.

Wally bleated, "You can't go out there in that. We're in space, fellow!"

Alata was big-eyed and tense now. "What would happen?" she asked, licking dry lips. "Would he—smother?"

Wally turned on her crossly. "He'd get air, all right, but he'd puff out like a marshmallow without a pressure suit."

Casey nodded. "You're right, old man. We'll have to find something to bind me up tight—all over." He reached out and felt of the hard-woven fabric of Wally's tunic. He shook his head. "Too stiff. If we just had some tape or even some light fabric—"

Gloria eyed him. "If you know about that air lock, you know that you can't get back in here if we let you out, unless we dump all our air. Then we'd all pop. So what's this business of going outside?"

CASEY PULLED himself over to the rear port and looked toward earth. "I understand. But there's no need for us all to die. I think I have an even chance of breaking that tip off before—I lose conciousness." He looked at Gloria and shrugged. "After that, well, it's a quick way to go. And it's better than staying in here and helping foul up the air. It's no picnic to smother in carbon dioxide, either. You turn black!"

Her mouth opened and her

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hands sought her throat. "And you're willing to—".

He looked down, bit his lip and said softly, "What else is there to do? Any spaceman would do as much." He turned and scanned the cabin again. "But we've got to find something to bind me with. Otherwise I'll bloat and bleed out before I can do any good out there."

"Bleed out?" Alata repeated with a morbid tone.

"Bleed out?" Casy sucked hard on the back of his hand and then showed them the crimson welt that appeared. "Space sucks at you like that, all over, like a million leeches. Ruptures the capillaries, then your blood boils."

Gloria shivered. "What can we do?"

Casey suddenly discovered the two girls with his searching eye. He let his gaze wander uncensored from slender ankles to bare shoulders. "I—I hate to suggest this, but—well, hell, it's up to you." He frowned, then he slipped his hand under his tunic and brought out his tiny service weapon that fit the palm of his hand. "Here," he said, floating it over to Gloria, "just so you'll be sure we don't get any ideas."

She picked it out of the air and stared down at it. Casey said, "Now, if you'll let us have your—clothes."

HE TURNED his back and signalled Wally to imitate him. He was made very busy with the oxygen rigging. Alata recovered first. "What," she asked weakly, "do you want with our clothes?"

Casey told her, "For strips. Tear them up into narrow strips, a few inches wide for binding."

There was a moment of silence, then the soft rustling of sheer fabric as Gloria began peeling. Alata asked, "Me, too?"

Casey said, "I'm afraid so. That stuff won't go far."

Wally caught the idea, grasped the first garment and began tearing up the skirt. Casey took the first strips as they were produced and began binding up his leg, around and around. He made much of the application, testing the fabric carefully and pulling it tightly as it would go.

Gloria's dress disappeared quickly. She had her slip over her head when a thought struck her. "Say, cloth isn't air tight. What good will this do?"

"Not much good at all," Casey said quickly, "—after about twenty seconds or so. But that should be long enough."

She finished removing the slip and s h u d d e r e d again. "You've got nerve, sailor. I guess this isn't too much to give to the cause. Come, Alata. Give! You want to be buried in that thing?"

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ALATA STARED from her thirty-five-dollar slip to the little pistol that was pressed between two cushions to keep it from drifting off. "But *you've* got panties on, dammit!"

A moment later Gloria held up the mentioned article before Alata. "Satisfied?"

Casey was pulling strips of the expensive cloth around his belly. He looked up and muttered, "Good girl! You've got the stuff to get you out of any jam."

Wally glanced up and uttered, "Amen!"

Casey was well up his chest with the second layer when they ran out of strips. "That's it, eh? Well, it will have to do." He glanced at the ship's chronometer and then out the rear port at earth for a long minute.

"Now, where's that mask?" Wally handed it to him, and he held it up as if to put it on. He paused and addressed the ladies, who were now drawn back in a corner, each with a loose cushion for a belly-band.

"I want you to know that I have no regrets for what is about to happen to me." He creased a careless smile on his young face. "Spacemen have often died for less."

Then he turned and offered a bandaged hand to Wally, who took it, turned his face toward the bow and strangled quietly. Casey looked like a second-hand mummy redecorated with a patchwork quilt, and the expression of noble sacrifice on his patch of bare face was almost more than the second officer could stand.

"WALLY, TAKE care of them," he commanded, jutting his chin out manfully. He swam over to the port again dragging ravellings, and this time he looked out so long that Gloria became curious.

"You—aren't g o i n g to—change your mind?"

Casey turned and dropped his long eyelashes. "I was just trying to find the courage to—to ask you—for one goodbye kiss, but—"

The blonde's eyes tightened at the corners. She scrambled for footing, but instead of throwing her arms around Casey, she pulled herself over and looked out the stern port herself.

A l a t a said impatiently, "For godsakes, Gloria, kiss the guy. He's going all out for us."

Instead, the "whip" took one look out the port, and clad only in her sandals, made a dive for the pistol. Casey had started to drift toward her with anticipation, but now he hauled himself to a stop, staring into the tiny parabolic business end of the weapon.

GLORIA'S eyes flashed the fire that had ignited au-

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diences from Siberia to Venus. "Stay put, you sawed-off Casanova!"

Alata gasped, "Of all the ungrateful—I'll kiss him myself!" She cast the cushion aside and floated toward her trussed hero just as the rear ports blacked out. Then the shadow engulfed the rest of the ship in darkness so heavy it seemed furry.

Alata squealed, "What happened?" Let me go! Let me—"

There was clank and a bump that rocked the ship, and suddenly lights flooded through all ports. Human heads sheathed in bubbles knocked against the bow transparency, and others stared through the peripheral ports. Then the boat rocked as if buffeted by a heavy wind, and sounds began penetrating the hull.

There was a loud hammering on the hatch. Casey floated to the instrument panel and flipped the door-switch. It came open reluctantly with a sigh and a "thuck!" A white-jacketed patrol officer with captain's rank on his shoulder-boards swam in up to his waist. Such rescues in the borders of space that required his presence as a qualified spaceman, were relatively rare, and the displeasure was evident in his flushed face and bristling gray scalp.

"Yerunderarrest," he declared bluntly, "violation 14 of the—" He recognized Wally's distinctive uniform. "Mister, a spaceman should know better than to take a little craft like this off at—"

Then he saw Casey.

He tilted his gold-plastered cap to the back of his head, caught a stubby lock of his gray hair between thumb and forefinger and twisted it thoughtfully. "And what in the misty hell of Venus might you be got up as?"

CASEY, WHO had given Alata a charitable shove back into the lounge at the last moment, held out both hands and fluttered the colorful fringe of his wrappings. "I haven't the foggiest idea, officer. The bartender at the Nevada Spaceport will verify that Mr. Brady and I were accosted by two strange ladies around midnight, and they invited us for a little ride. We had no warning that—well, that *this* would happen!"

"That *what* would happen?" the patrol captain shouted, and he nosed through the bulkhead and looked aft. His grizzled chin dropped, and his eyebrows disappeared in the wrinkles of his tortured forehead. Behind the tiny, trembling hand-weapon was a pile of velvet cushions, behind which was a floating tumble of platinum hair and a very bare shoulder, behind which was a veritable cascade of flaming hair and considerably more bare anatomy of highest quality.

Casey pointed a shrouded

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arm at the inarticulate girls. "The blonde one got my pistol away from me in a—scuffle. Then they drank up our whiskey and insisted on trussing me up like this. Claimed they were inventing a new charade called 'Daddy is a Mummy' ".

He kicked a swaddled foot at the bared escape hatch in the deck. "When we tried to resist their—will—they kept threatening to dump us both out into the dark blue yonder." He reached out and captured the whiskey bottle and swished the remaining swallow or two around to make his point. "They probably won't make much sense until they sober up.

WALLY WAS staring anxiously at his chronometer when the patrol captain snapped him rigid with, *"And you, mister!* What do you say?"

Wally shook his head sadly. "Never spent such a night in my life. Would it be proper to file kidnapping charges under the circumstances? That is, if we don't have to spend too much time about it. The *Orion* blasts off in a few hours. Mr. Fuller and I are ship's company."

"So we'd be obliged, sir, if you could put us down soon as possible," Casey added crisply.

The captain looked from Casey, to Wally, then back at the girls whose mouths were opening and closing noislessly. "You—ladies—you look familiar," he said. Then he clenched his eyes and put a hand to his forehead. "Hollywood! I might have known it!"

He turned back to Casey. "I guess I'll have to believe your story. No spaceman, let alone an officer, would be dumb enough to take off from a spaceport of full jets, with all the radar gear we have screening the place. You people looked like a berseck mail rocket. We got calls from four states, and half the North American Continental radar posts were tracking you. No," he decided, "if you have your credentials with you, I'll believe you. You couldn't get that drunk."

Casey turned to the ladies and hiccuped solemnly. "If there is undersirable publicity from this incident," he stated, "you will hear from our attorneys. A spaceman's dignity is not lightly impugned."

He beckoned to his shipmate. "Come, Wallace. We must prepare a statement for the press, so there will be no misunderstanding."

As an afterthought, he moved back to Gloria and plucked the weapon from her limp fingers. As he leaned over her he whispered, "Farewell, gorgeous. See you in the headlines.

★

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illustration by EMSH

HUNTING MACHINE

by Carol Emshwiller

(author of "The Piece Thing")

IT SENSED Ruthie McAlister's rapid heartbeat, just as it sensed any other animal's. The palms of her hands were damp, and it felt that, too—it also felt the breathing, in and out. And it heard, her nervous giggle.

She was watching her husband, Joe, as he leaned over the control unit of the thing that sensed heartbeats the grey-green thing they called the hound, or Rover, or sometimes the bitch.

"Hey," she said. "I guess it's OK, huh?"

Joe turned a screw with his thumb nail and pulled out the wire attached to it. "Gimme a bobby pin."

Ruthie reached to the back of her head. "I mean it's not dangerous is it?"

"Naw."

"I don't just mean about *it*." She nodded at the grey-green thing. "I mean, I know you're good at fixing things like this, like the time you got

A vignette of tomorrow, and its brave, brave sportsmen!

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beer for nothing out of the beer vendor and, golly, I guess we haven't paid for a TV show for years. I mean, I *know* you can fix things right, only won't they know when we bring it back to be checked out?"

"Look, these wardens are country boys, and besides, I can put this thing back so *nobody* knows."

The gray-green thing squatted on its six legs where Joe could lean over it; it sensed that Ruthie's heartbeat had slowed almost normal, to and it heard her sigh.

"I guess you're pretty good at this, huh, Joe?" She wiped her damp hands on her green tunic. "That's the weight dial, isn't it?" she asked, watching him turn the top one.

He nodded. "Fifteen hundred pounds," he said slowly.

"Oo, was he really and truely that big?"

"Bigger." And now the thing felt Joe's heart and breathing surge.

They had been landed day before yesterday, with them geodesic tent, pnumatic forms beds, automatic camping stove, and pocket air conditioner. Plus portable disposal automatic blow-up chairs and tables, pocket TV set, four disposable hunting costumes apiece (one for each day), and two folding guns with power settings.

In addition, there was the bug-scat, go-snake, sun-stop, and the grey-green hunter, sealed by the warden and set for three birds, two deer and one black bear. They had only the bear to go; now, Joe McAlister had unsealed the controls, released the governer and changed the setting to brown bear, 1500 pounds.

"I don't care," he said, "I want that bear."

"Do you think he'll still be there tomorrow?"

Joe patted one of the long jointed legs of the thing. "If he's not, ol' bitch here will find him for us."

NEXT DAY, was clear and cool, and Joe breathed big, expanding breaths and patted his beginning paunch. "Yes sir," he said, "this is the day for something big—something really big, that'll put up a real fight."

He watched the red of the sunrise fade out of the sky while Ruthie turned on the stove and then got out her make-up kit. She put sun-stop on her face, then powdered it with a tan powder. She blackened her eyelids and purpled her lips; after that, she opened the stove and took out two disposable plates with eggs and bacon.

They sat in the automatic blow-up chairs, at the automatic blow-up table. Joe said that there was nothing like North air to give you an appetite, and Ruthie said she bet they were sweltering back at the city. Then she giggled.

Joe leaned back in his chair

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and sipped his coffee. "Shooting deer is just like shooting a cow," he said. "No fight to 'em at all. Even when ol' hound here goads 'em, they just want to run off. But this bear's going to be different. Of course bears are shy too, but ol' hound knows what to do about that."

"They say it's getting to be so there aren't many of the big kind left."

"Yes, but one more won't hurt. Think of a skin and head that size in our living room. I guess anybody that came in there would sure sit up and take notice."

"It won't match the curtains," his wife said.

"I think what I'll do is pack the skin up tight and leave it somewhere up here, till the warden checks us through. Then, maybe a couple of days later, I'll come back and get it."

"Good idea." Ruthie had finished her coffee and was perfuming herself with bugscat.

"WELL, I GUESS we'd better get started." They hung their folded up guns on their belts. They put their dehydrated, self heating lunch in their pockets. They slung on their cold-unit canteens. They each took a packet containing chair, table and sun shade; then Joe fastened on the little mike that controled the hunter. It fit on his shoulder where he could turn his head to the side and talk into it.

"All right, houn' dog," he said, shoulder hunched and head tilted, "get a move on, boy. Back to that spot where we saw him yesterday. You can pick up the scent from there."

The hunting machine ran on ahead of them. It went faster than anything it might have to hunt. Two miles, three miles—Joe and Ruthie were left behind. They followed the beam it sent back to them, walking and talking and helping each other over the rough spots.

About eleven o'clock, Joe stopped, took off his red hunting hat and mopped his balding forehead with the new bandana he'd bought at Hunter's Outfitters in New York. It was then he got the signal. *Sighted, sighted, sighted...*

Joe leaned over his mike. "Stick on him boy. How far are you? Well, try to move him down this way if you can." He turned to his wife. "let's see, about three miles... we'll take half hour out for lunch. Maybe we'll get there a couple of hours from now. How's it going, kid?"

"Swell," Ruthie said.

THE BIG bear sat on the rocks by the stream. His front paws were wet almost to the elbows. There were three torn fishheads lying beside him. He ate only the best parts because he was a

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good fisher; and he looked, now, into the clean cold water for another dark blue back that would pause on its way upstream.

It wasn't a smell that made him turn. He had a keen nose, but the hunting machine was made to have no smell. It was the grey dead lichen's crackel that made him look up. He stood still, looking in the direction of the sound and squinting his small eyes, but it wasn't until it moved that he saw it.

Three quarters of a ton, he was; but like a bird, or a rabbit, or a snake, the bear avoided things that were large and strange. He turned back the way he always took, the path to his rubbing tree and to his home. He moved quietly and rapidly, but the thing followed.

He doubled back to the stream again, then, and waded down it on the opposite side from the thing—but still it followed, needing no scent. Once the hunting machine sighted, it never lost its prey.

Heart beat normal respiration normal, it sensed. Size almost 1600 pounds.

The bear got out on the bank and turned back, calling out in low growls. He stood up on his hind legs and stretched his full higth. Almost two men tall, he stood and gave warning.

The hunting machine waited twenty yards away. The bear looked at it a full minute; then he fell back on all fours and turned South again. He was shy and he wanted no trouble.

JOE AND Ruthie kept on walking North at their leisurely pace until just noon. Then they stopped for lunch by the side of the same stream the bear had waded, only lower down. And they used its cold water on their dehydrated meal—beef and onions, mashed potatoes, a lettuce salad that unfolded in the water like Japanese paper flowers. There were coffee tablets that contained a heating unit too, and fizzled in the water like firecracker fuses until the water was hot, creamy coffee.

The bear didn't stop to eat. Noon meant nothing to him. Now he moved with more purpose, looking back and squinting his small eyes.

The hunter felt the heart beat faster, the breathing heavy, pace increasing. Direction generally South.

Joe and Ruthie followed the signal until it suddenly changed. It came faster; that meant they were near.

They stopped and unfolded their guns. "Let's have a cup of coffee first," Ruthie said.

"OK, Hon." Joe released the chairs which blew themselves up to size. "Good to take a break so we can really enjoy the fight."

Ruthie handed Joe a fizzing cup of coffee. "Don't

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forget you want ol' Rover to goad some."

"Uh huh. Bear's not much better than a deer without it. Good you reminded me." He turned and spoke softly into the little mike.

The hunting machine shortened the distance slowly. Fifteen feet, ten, five. The bear heard and turned. Again he rose up, almost two men tall, and roared his warning sound to tell the thing to keep back.

Joe and Ruthie shivered and didn't look at each other. They hear it less with their ears, and more with their spines—with an instinct they had forgotten.

Joe shook his shoulder to shake away the feeling of the sound. "I guess the ol' bitch is at him."

"Good dog," Ruthie said. "Get 'im, boy."

The hunter's arm tips drew blood, but only in the safe spots—shoulder scratches at the heavy lump behind his head, thigh punctures. It never touched the veins, or arteries.

THE BEAR swung at the thing with his great paw. His claws screetched down the body section but didn't so much as make a mark on the metal. The blow sent the thing thrity feet away, but it got up and came back so fast the bear couldn't see it until it was there, thrusting at him again. He threw it again and again, but it came back every time. The muscles, claws and teeth were nothing to it. It was made to withstand easily more than what one bear could do, and it knew with its built-in knowledge, how to make a bear blind-angry.

Saliva came to the bear's mouth and flew out over his chin as he moved his heavy head sideways and back. It splashed, gummy on his cheek and made dark, damp streaks across his chest. Only his rage was real to him now, and he screamed a deep rasp of frustration again and again.

Two hundred yards away, Joe said, "Some roar!"

"Uh huh. If noise means anything, it sounds like he's about ready for a real fight."

They both got up and folded up the chairs and cups. They sighted along their gun barrels to see that they were straight. "Set 'em at medium," Joe said. "We want to start off slow."

They came to where the bear was, and took up a good position on a high place. Joe called in his mike to the hunter thing. "Stand by, houn' dog, and slip over here to back us up." Then he called to the bear. "Hey, boy. This way, boy. This way."

THE GREY-GREEN thing moved back and the bear saw the new enemy, two of them. He didn't hesitate; he was ready to charge anything that moved. He was only five feet away when their

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small guns popped. The force knocked him down, and he rolled out of the way, dazed; he turned again for another charge, and came at them, all claws and teeth.

Joe's gun popped again. This time the bear staggered, but still came on. Joe backed up, pushing at his gun dial to raise the power. He bumped into Ruthie behind him and they both fell. Joe's voice was a crazy scream. "Get him."

The hunting machine moved fast. Its sharp forearm came like an upper cut, under the jaw, and into the brain.

He lay, looking smaller, somehow, but still big, his ragged fur matted with blood. Fleas were alive on it, and flies already coming. Joe and Ruthie looked down at him and took big breaths.

"You shouldna got behind me," Joe said as soon as he caught his breath. "I coulda kept it going longer if you'd a just stayed out of the way."

"You told me to," Ruthie said. "You told me to stay right behind you."

"Well, I didn't mean *that* close."

Ruthie sniffed. "Anyway," she said, "how are you going to get the fur off it?"

"Hmmmph."

"I don't think that moth-eaten thing will make much of a rug. It's pretty dirty, too, and probably full of germs."

Joe walked around the bear and turned its head sideways with his toe. "Be a big messy job, all right, skinning it. Up to the elbows in blood and gut, I guess."

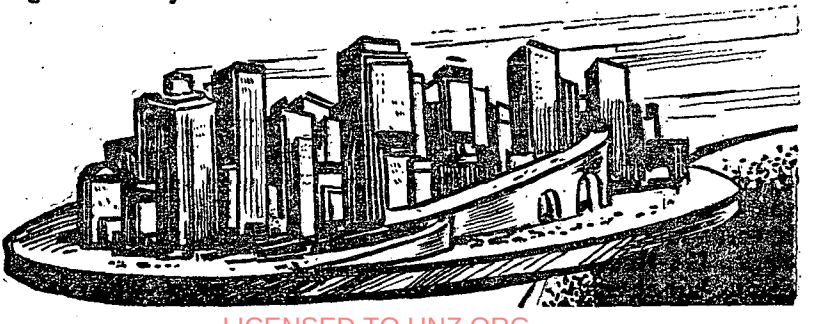
"I didn't expect it to be like *this* at all," Ruthie said. "Why don't you just forget it. You had your fun."

Joe stood, looking at the bears head. He watched a fly land on its eye and then walk down to a damp nostril.

"Well come *on*." Ruthie took her small pack. "I want to get back in time to take a bath before supper."

"O. K." Joe leaned over his mike. "Come on ol' Rover, ol' hound dog. You did fine."

★



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The Janus City

(*continued from page* 120)

caverns, and the white sun blazed through gapping holes in the roof.

Roger came, at last, to his Machine. The body of a woman lay across the console. He flung it aside rudely, a thing which profaned the sanctity of the temple.

He bent over the console and tried to knit the broken wires together. A gust of chlorine wind swirled into his face, and agonizing tears came into his eyes. On the floor he saw a black notebook. He picked it up and glanced at the open page, smeared with blood. The words were clear, boldly written.

"The equality of all men—we must fight for that, and die for it if necessary."

The symbols conveyed no meaning to Roger. He threw the book aside.

Once again, driven by a sudden fury of terror, he tried to mend the shattered wires. Everything would be all right, if only the shaft would turn again. He was certain of that; he knew the Machine was his responsibility. He turned the dials and listened hopefully for the hum of the turbines.

He heard, instead, the scream of the chlorine gale sweeping desert dust into the City of Janus.

★

The Last word

(*continued from page* 62)

would like to trade for back issues of S. F. magazines. Preferred are 1940-1950 issues of *Thrilling Wonder Stories, Startling Stories, Astounding, Planet Stories*, and *Super Science Stories*. Also I would like to trade, for some mentioned, or others, various issues of National Geographic from the middle 1940's and many *Popular Mechanics, Mechanix Illus.*, etc. from the late 1940's and from the early 1950's. All magazines have covers and are in good condition. I will also trade Big Little Better books.

How about a debate topic in SFS. I say that time travel (except mentally) is impossible. I think I can prove this. Let's choose up sides. All cons (not ex-) follow me toward victory.

Roger A. Weir

My humble apologies, Roger, for (a) misplacing your letter, and (b) losing your address. Tell you what: suppose you write me and let me know your current address. Anyone who'd like to trade with you can write to this magazine, and I'll forward their letters.

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Inside Science Fiction

(*continued from page 71*)

can be obtained by outsiders also. What we like in particular is Dan McPhail's feature, "Smoke Signals," which is a history of s-f, more or less, as seen by McPhail. Dan was very active in the early days of science fiction, and is adding invaluable information concerning that era. This is recommended to those of you who are interested in what went on way back when.

All fanzines for review should be sent to Robert A. Madle, in care of this magazine, since your reviewer will have left his former address by the time this sees print.

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